LOOSE ENDS AND KNOTS

AN ALTERNATE HISTORY NDVEL
ON THE SECOND PARTITION OF INDIA

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The author can be reached at ramboji@gmail.com

I miss you

PROLOGUE

In the annals of modern Indian fiction, a pivotal moment remains shrouded in silence—the brink of a second partition, a mere two decades after shaking off colonial chains. This near-repetition of division was fueled by deep-seated ethnic discord due to the alleged imposition of Hindi in the southern states of the country.

This novel seeks to explore the underlying tensions between the southern and northern states that continue to exist in present-day India, using an alternate history framework. While set in Dravida, that was partitioned from Hindustan, it also borrows from the historical experience of South Korea, a country that was divided after war but is united in this novel.

The impetus behind this narrative fusion is a curiosity to explore alternate histories, to rethink critical junctures, and to uncover the hidden narratives that mold our reality.

It is therefore important to be aware of the actual history of the anti-Hindi agitations in the state of Tamil Nadu to appreciate the 'what if' scenarios.

These protests originated a decade before independence, ignited by the Madras Presidency's edict to enforce Hindi in schools—a decree from the first Congress government led by C. Rajagopalachari, endearingly termed the 'Mango of Salem'. The policy faced swift, fierce resistance, sparking three years of intense demonstrations, including fasts, rallies, and civil disobedience.

The authorities' severe crackdown resulted in two fatalities and the detention of 1,198 people, including minors. The public's vehement reaction forced the British Governor of Madras, Lord John Erskine, to revoke the policy in February 1940 after the Congress Government resigned.

Post-independence, as India undertook the herculean task of Constitution-making, the choice of an official language became a hotly debated issue. The Constituent Assembly decided on Hindi as the official language, with English as an auxiliary for a fifteen-year transition. However, this decision faced opposition from several southern states post-1965, advocating for English's continued official status.

The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), then an emerging political force in Tamil Nadu, led the opposition to Hindi imposition, steered by the

revered 'Arignar' Conjeevaran Natarajan Annadurai. To address their concerns, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru enacted the Official Languages Act in 1963, ensuring English's use beyond the fifteen-year threshold. Yet, the Act's vagueness left the DMK skeptical, fearing future governments might not honor Nehru's assurances.

After Nehru's passing in May 1964, Lal Bahadur Shastri became Prime Minister. His cabinet, including Hindi proponents like Morarji Desai and Gulzari Lal Nanda, heightened fears that Nehru's 1959 and 1963 pledges might be abandoned.

Discontent over Hindi's favored status in government jobs, civil service exams, and the potential replacement of English in education led to a surge in student-led anti-Hindi protests. On March 7, 1964, Madras State's Chief Minister Minjur Bhaktavatsalam suggested a tri-lingual formula—English, Hindi, Tamil—in the state assembly, further alarming students and bolstering the anti-Hindi movement.

As the January 26, 1965, deadline for Hindi's sole official status approached, the anti-Hindi movement in Madras State gained momentum, especially among university students. The Tamil Nadu Students Anti Hindi Agitation Council formed in January to lead the protests. The council, comprising student leaders from across the state, organized conferences to resist Hindi's imposition. The Madras State Anti-Hindi Conference in Trichy, with 700 delegates from various states, unanimously called for an indefinite suspension of English's marginalization. The Union Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, under Indira Gandhi (Nehru's daughter), exacerbated tensions by ordering a switch from English to Hindi starting January 26.

The Chief Minister made a resolute declaration, pledging to uphold the dignity of Republic Day. To preempt any disturbance, Annadurai and 3,000 supporters were preemptively detained. The next day, a throng of 50,000 students marched from Napier Park to the Government Secretariat at Fort St. George, intending to present a petition to the Chief Minister, who refused to meet them, arguing that the protests were harmful to national cohesion, educational progress, and the students' own interests.

Feeling slighted, the students' anger overflowed. They left their classes, burned effigies representing the 'Hindi demoness,' and vandalized Hindi signs at public sites. The disorder intensified as shops and transportation networks

were extensively damaged. The police's aggressive tactics, including the use of firearms, only aggravated the situation. The unrest struck a chord with the general public, leading to broad participation in strikes and protests.

In a distressing development, several young people chose self-immolation, using kerosene to express their protest, resulting in five students dying in the flames within the first two days, while three more died from poisoning. The police's deadly actions took another life, igniting further dissent. Amidst the turmoil, educational institutions throughout the state, such as Madras University and Annamalai University, indefinitely ceased operations.

The disturbance continued into early February. Following a tense ten-day deadlock, student leaders met with the Chief Minister to seek a solution. He engaged with them reluctantly, but the talks stalled, returning the situation to its contentious start. Protests became a regular event. Within a fortnight, the student-led protests had escalated beyond control.

By mid-February, the death toll had reached an estimated 70, with some unconfirmed reports suggesting it might be as high as 500. The number of student arrests increased. The turmoil drew the attention of the Central Government. Two senior cabinet ministers from Madras State, who supported the Constitutional recognition of English as an official language, resigned in protest.

Faced with an escalating revolt among his ranks, the Prime Minister recognized the seriousness of the crisis. In an effort to calm the unrest, he conceded and spoke to the nation on the radio, offering a conciliatory ceasefire proposal.

In a momentous broadcast, the Prime Minister made five critical commitments:

- *Autonomy in Language: Each state was guaranteed the freedom to conduct its affairs in its chosen language—whether the regional tongue or English.*
- *Bilingual Communications: Inter-state communication would occur in English or be accompanied by an accurate English translation.*
- *Freedom for Non-Hindi States: States where Hindi was not the primary language could continue engaging with the central government in English, with the assurance that this practice would not change without their consent.*

- *English at the Central Level: English would remain in use for central government transactions.*
- *Civil Services Examinations: The All India Civil Services examination would be conducted in English, not exclusively in Hindi.*

These commitments helped quell the unrest. While isolated protests persisted until March 14th, most students returned to their studies, and the DMK ceased its protests as Annadurai and other detained leaders were released.

However, Shastri's attempts to revise the Official Languages Act faced staunch opposition from Hindi proponents. Both the ruling party and the opposition hesitated to publicly air their discord in Parliament. Eventually, the Congress Working Committee adopted a resolution that slowed the spread of Hindi, emphasized robust enforcement of the three-language policy, and allowed public service exams to be taken in all regional languages. Unfortunately, the three-language formula lacked consistent implementation across India, and proposed changes to the exams met with disapproval from officials. The sole tangible concession was the promise to amend the Official Languages Act—an undertaking met with persistent resistance.

In the spring of 1965, a cabinet sub-committee convened to deliberate on the linguistic policy but failed to reach a consensus. Their recommendation was to maintain English and Hindi as co-official languages, rejecting any quota system or inclusion of regional languages in public service examinations. An amendment to the Official Languages Act was drafted to enshrine Nehru's assurances into law.

The proposed Bill, which aimed to secure the use of English for inter-state and central-state communications at the discretion of non-Hindi speaking states, was scheduled for parliamentary discussion on August 25th. However, it was retracted amidst heated debate over timing.

The political landscape shifted when Shastri passed away in January 1966, and Indira Gandhi assumed the role of Prime Minister. The 1967 elections witnessed the Congress party's weakening grip, while Madras State saw the rise of the DMK, signaling the end of Congress rule there.

In late 1967, renewed efforts to amend the language Bill emerged. It was introduced in Parliament on November 27, passed on December 16, and received the President's assent on January 8, 1968, thereby coming into force.

This amendment solidified a virtually indefinite policy of bilingualism in official matters.

The 1965 agitations catalyzed significant political shifts within the state, with the DMK's victory in the 1967 assembly elections serving as a pivotal moment—the Congress has not regained power since.

And so, against this tumultuous backdrop, the novel unfolds. The characters, drawn from history's pages, are faithfully represented up to the year 1965.

In this reimagined tale, Korea stands as a beacon of unity, its parliamentary democracy and mixed economy a stark contrast to the divided reality of today.

Following the Korean War, South Korea enjoyed a fleeting democratic period before an 18-year military regime took hold, spurring industrial growth. It was not until 1987 that democracy reemerged, a chronology creatively adjusted in this narrative. North Korea, in contrast, continues under the Kim dynasty's authoritarian grip.

This novel envisions a Korea that, after the conflict, remains whole and democratic, though it wrestles with the challenges of a nation in development. It reimagines a unified Korea, diverging from the historical trajectory of the two separate states that exist today.

This blend of creativity and history offers a space for reflection, prompting readers to muse over the 'what ifs' and allows for a deeper examination of the cultural and political dynamics of the time.

July 11, 2005, 9 PM

It was a hot and humid Monday. Sitting pensively on a plastic bucket seat at the arrival gates of Annadurai International Airport, Naga was sweating profusely. He always did, when he was tense.

The evening was damp and sultry. A light drizzle had cooled the mercury, and the breeze from the Bay of Bengal helped it slide even further. But Naga's hyperactive sweat glands paid no heed.

His forehead glistened, beads of sweat expanding and dissolving into his bushy eyebrows. Some adventurous droplets escaped sideways, avoiding stress-acne, seeking refuge in his hollow cheeks. The expensive aftershave lotion mingled with the sweat—a convergence of classes, so to speak.

Naga involuntarily sniffed the pungent combination, patted his face, and wiped his cold, wet palms on his jeans. Lost in thought, he glanced at his Rolex—a gift from his roommate Sunder for his 33rd birthday last Thursday.

Corean Air flight CE608 from Pyongyang to Madras circled overhead, ready to touch down. Naga's mundane solitary life was about to jolt into excitement, twisting beyond repair. He hoped against hope that Maya wouldn't shatter his illusions.

After months of nerve-wracking waiting, his online friend was finally arriving. Their social interactions had spanned 3,296 miles, with romantic undercurrents carried through submarine cables and airwaves. But now it was time to get real.

He vividly recalled her first email, seeking clarifications on his op-ed piece dissecting the political economy of South Asian countries over the past two decades. She accused him of using fraudulent data to camouflage the truth, citing IMF statistics to the contrary.

One look at the email, and he nailed the problem: her data was in nominal terms, while he had used PPP computations of gross domestic product. How could any serious economics student make this mistake? She claimed to be a research scholar at Corea University.

Their shaky online friendship had stabilized and branched out to personal interest in each other's lives. But there was one thing that bothered him.

Maya consistently avoided Skype for virtual chats. Despite his detailed explanations of the software, she always found excuses not to install it on her personal computer. After much persuasion, she finally sent him a panoramic photograph taken last winter. The Pyongyang scenery was captivating, but her face was hazy, minutely pixelated on purpose.

What was going on?

Naga's anticipation was a mix of hope and skepticism as he sat in the bustling terminal of Annadurai International Airport. Maya's reluctance to share her age or engage in a video chat had sown seeds of doubt in his mind. The internet was rife with tales of deception, and he couldn't help but wonder if Maya was another mirage in the digital desert.

Dravida, his homeland, was a beacon of progress, attracting seekers from less fortunate lands. Yet, amidst this prosperity, Naga stood out—not for lack of achievement, as he was a seasoned journalist from a family of distinction—but for his untouched romantic life, a stark contrast to the liberated youth around him.

He clung to the fragments of Maya's identity: the sole progeny of academic retirees, a free spirit in her late twenties, a doctoral candidate at Corea University. Her journey to Madras was for research, but Naga feared his role in her life was merely instrumental.

In a moment of reflection, he chose to trust, echoing his father's wisdom:

Whatever happens, happens for the good.

Maya had sought a platonic bond, and it was Naga who had blurred the lines. Now, as he awaited her arrival, he hoped for the best, yearning for the father he barely knew to witness this chapter of his life unfold.

Suddenly, Naga's thoughts scrambled, and he missed his father. Although he had no memories to cherish, a weather-beaten photograph—taken with two other gentlemen—remained his sole connection. Wrapped in silk cloth alongside his father's diary, it held secrets of a bygone era.

His father's Telugu diary, spanning just the first six months of 1965, was a treasure trove of insights. Government records claimed Hindustan agents kidnapped him in 1975, but some outliers whispered of defection or espionage. Naga dismissed these as crackpot conspiracy theories.

As reality settled in, an airport announcement shattered the calm. Flight CE608 from Pyongyang had landed. Maya would soon emerge, and Naga's anticipation swirled with hope and uncertainty. The encounter at Annadurai Airport would reveal whether she was who she claimed to be.

Naga's heart swelled with a sense of pride as he realized the remarkable efficiency of Dravida's premier airport. It was no small feat that passengers could swiftly navigate through immigration, retrieve their luggage, and emerge at the arrival gates in record time. This seamless process was a testament to why the airport had been lauded as the world's best for eight consecutive years.

Just an hour earlier, Naga had submitted a story highlighting this very efficiency, a subtle yet satisfying nudge at the slower pace of their northern neighbor's facilities. This point of pride was particularly poignant now, as Maya, whose views seemed to align with Hindustan's old-school communist beliefs, was about to witness Dravida's modern prowess first-hand.

Naga couldn't help but think that a few days in Dravida might just be enough to shift her perspective.

He vividly remembered the email exchange from four weeks ago, a moment that nearly drove him to block all contact with Maya. It all began innocuously—a forwarded joke:

> *Thought this joke will help your research. It is actually true. A JNU professor asked the students: How many different economic systems exist in the world today?*
>
> *A student replied: There are three. Our Aatmanirbhar economic system, Capitalism, and Communism.*
>
> *The professor asked again: Of these three, which system will be victorious in the end?*
>
> *The student replied: I really can't say...*
>
> *The professor was outraged: The answer is clear. Aatmanirbhar is the only system that will prevail over all other existing economic systems and become victorious in the end!*

The student stammered and replied: Yes, I learned that... but when that happens, which country will give us food aid?

Maya's curt response in broken English caught him off guard:

'Please grow up. I do not like communist jokes made by capitalists. Hindustan has self-respect and does not bend before American imperialism. It is better to share a little wealth than be selfish. Socialism is superior to capitalism.'

The shock reverberated within him. Maya, a far-left sympathizer, hailed from a country that claimed moral high ground while subtly receiving material support from China. Hindustan, a Soviet satellite, purported to follow its indigenous self-reliance ideology, but everyone knew its political foundation was communism.

Respect for self, indeed!

Naga harbored a deep loathing for communism—an ideology that had divided India and kept his motherland on constant alert. But more significantly, the Hindustani agents had kidnapped his father, later claiming defection. His father's fate remained a mystery.

Despite his initial outburst—calling her a 'bitch'—Naga's weakness prevailed. A couple of apologies later, he resumed their usual email banter, attempting to flirt as best he could. Now, he eagerly awaited Maya's arrival, torn between skepticism and longing.

As passengers from Pyongyang began to trickle out, Naga's heart raced with a mix of dread and anticipation. He had never actually seen Maya. What if she wasn't the person he had imagined? And amidst the sea of faces, how would he recognize her?

In a moment of whimsy, he had described his attire in his last email—a dark blue shirt and a yellow handkerchief, reminiscent of a scene from a Tamil movie. But with no response from Maya, doubt crept in.

He peered at the photo he had of her, comparing it to the crowd. They all seemed to share similar features, making it hard to distinguish one from another. Then, the pungent scent of kimchi hit him, and he nearly gagged.

A soft voice interrupted his thoughts.

'Excuse me, please. Are you Naga? I am Maya from Corea.'

He turned to see a young woman, her skin flawless except for a small pimple. She was tall, with an oval face, large eyes, and a sharp nose—nothing like the others he had seen.

'Yes,' he replied, his voice barely above a whisper, as he quickly hid the handkerchief and photo.

She was real—Maya, not just an illusion.

'So glad to finally meet you,' he said, his eyes taking her in.

She smiled, complimenting his youthful appearance. 'You look so young, small face,' she said, a beauty standard in her country.

He laughed it off, commenting on her improved English and the size of her luggage. 'Do you plan to settle down here?'

Her playful response, 'Do you want me to?' sent his heart into a flutter.

'Will you, if I want?' he asked, half-joking, half-serious.

'That depends on how you treat me,' she teased. They were flirting already, and Naga felt a rush of excitement. 'You will not be disappointed,' he assured her.

'I hope not,' she said, her gaze dropping to his shoes, hinting at her disappointment with his fashion sense. But she let it slide. He wasn't bad-looking, just in need of a little grooming.

Relieved that he didn't come off as creepy, Naga knew he had to step up his game. A haircut and a wardrobe update were definitely in order.

'Wait here while I fetch my car,' Naga instructed, leaving Maya with her luggage at the entrance gates.

'Is it safe for me?' Maya's concern was evident.

'Absolutely, this isn't Delhi,' Naga called back, vanishing behind a pillar toward the parking lot.

Maya clutched her belongings tightly. Back in Pyongyang, the streets were off-limits for unaccompanied young women after dark. She recalled a recent assault back home that had left her parents anxious about her solo travels. Yet here, she stood unbothered—a foreigner alone in a new land, grateful for the unexpected sense of security.

Minutes passed, and a helpful policeman was the only one to interrupt her solitude. Then, Naga returned, driving a BMW M3—a luxury she'd only seen in films.

'Isn't this car expensive?' Maya inquired as Naga stowed her suitcase.

'It's a second-hand 1990 model, quite affordable for a journalist like me,' he replied. 'Come on, get in the front seat with me.'

Apologizing, Maya explained her unfamiliarity with private cars.

'No worries, you'll get used to it,' Naga reassured her.

'Have you arranged a guesthouse for me until I find an apartment?' Maya asked.

'No need. You can stay in our spare room until my roommate returns,' Naga offered as he shifted gears.

Grateful, Maya accepted, eager to conserve her research funds.

Their conversation flowed from her restless flight to their differing views on movies. Naga promised to introduce her to Dravida's award-winning cinema, curious about her knowledge of films.

Maya clarified her research focus on the contradictions in capitalist countries post-civil war, sparking a debate on economic systems and national prosperity.

Naga's skepticism about socialist success was met with Maya's distinction between communist and socialist states. Their exchange grew heated as they discussed national development and freedom.

But when Maya mentioned Naga's father's alleged defection to Hindustan, the tension peaked, and Naga abruptly hit the brakes.

'Who told you that?' Naga's voice rose sharply.

Maya, taken aback by his reaction, fell silent. Naga's voice was stern as he defended his father's honor. '*Nanagaru* was kidnapped in broad daylight at Madras Central by those commies. He fought for our independence. Why would he defect?'

The truth about his father's fate was shrouded in mystery—kidnapped, murdered, an accident, or defected? Only a vague eyewitness account existed, and then there was the official statement from Hindustan, which Naga could never accept.

'I'm sorry. Let's change the topic,' Maya suggested softly.

The car ride continued in silence, the tension palpable. Naga's mind raced with regret. Maya, sensing his discomfort, gently broached a lighter subject. 'What's your father's full name? Everyone knows him as Subbaiah.'

'P. Subbaiah,' he responded, his tone softening.

'And the full name?' Maya prodded.

'Pallypalli,' Naga replied, to which Maya stifled a laugh.

'What's so funny?' Naga's confusion was evident.

Maya explained, 'In Corean, *palli palli* means to do something quickly. So, you're Naga Palli Palli, right? Quick to lose your temper.'

Naga explained the use of initials in Dravidian culture to avoid caste distinctions, unlike in Hindustan. The conversation shifted to Maya's real name, Choi Eu-hoo, which Naga playfully mocked, lightening the mood.

By the time they reached his apartment complex, the atmosphere had eased, and Naga found himself humming a popular Corean tune, a sign that the earlier tension had dissipated.

'Is C-Pop a thing here in Dravida?' Maya inquired, her curiosity piqued.

Naga shook his head, 'Not quite. I've done some digging online. Dravida hasn't caught the *hallyu* wave yet, but give it time. Who knows? In a few years, they might be grooving to Corean beats.' He paused, a hint of remorse in his voice. 'And about earlier, I'm sorry for losing my cool.'

Maya nodded, understandingly. 'It's okay. I get it. Family topics can hit a nerve.'

As they neared their destination, Naga pointed out his building. 'That's where I live, up on the 26th floor.'

Maya gazed upward, impressed. '26 floors? That's unheard of back home. How tall is this building?'

'It's a 40-story structure, one of the modest ones around here,' Naga explained, a note of pride in his voice.

Maya was in awe. The old section of the city was this advanced; she could only imagine what the new section held. As they approached the complex, the gates swung open automatically, prompting her to ask about the lack of security guards.

'Welcome to the automated world of Madras,' Naga said with a smile. 'We have chips that grant us access and ensure security. Everything's monitored.'

He deftly parked the car in the underground lot, sparing Maya further questions that might betray her unfamiliarity with such modern conveniences. Her research hadn't prepared her for the reality of Dravida's rapid development. The contrast with her homeland was stark, especially when she recalled her arrival at the gleaming airport terminal—a far cry from the facilities back in Pyongyang.

Maya's professors had painted a picture of Dravida that was far from reality. They claimed it was only slightly more advanced than Corea and Hindustan, but as the elevator ascended to the 26th floor, Maya felt a sense of awe she hadn't anticipated. The view of Madras at night was breathtaking—a cityscape filled with glittering skyscrapers that seemed to touch the sky.

'Isn't it incredible?' Naga asked, noticing her amazement. 'All our major cities are like this. You'll see when we travel.'

Maya remembered the image from *The Economist*—a stark contrast between the illuminated Dravida and the dark void of Hindustan, with only Delhi shining faintly. Her professors had dismissed it as manipulation, but now she wasn't so sure.

Inside Naga's apartment, Maya was struck by the neatness and modernity. The living room was spacious, with a luxurious leather sofa and a large flat-screen TV unlike any she'd seen before.

'What's that?' she asked, pointing at the screen.

'That's an HDTV, the latest from Dayanora,' Naga replied, a hint of pride in his voice. 'Dayanora Group is a cornerstone of Dravidian industry.'

Maya nodded, recalling her studies on the Asian Tigers and Dayanora's influence on Dravida's growth.

As Naga flicked through the channels, Maya was impressed by the vivid images. When he stopped on Corea's state broadcaster, he joked about changing his satellite provider for her comfort.

'Thanks, but I'm more interested in Dollywood movies,' Maya said, eager to immerse herself in the local culture.

Naga showed her to her room, assuring her that despite its size, it had all the amenities she'd need, including a bidet and toilet paper—a luxury compared to the underdeveloped conditions in Hindustan.

Exhausted, Maya thanked Naga for his hospitality and retired to her room, looking forward to a hot shower and rest. Naga offered her anything she might need from the kitchen and agreed to wake her up in the morning.

After she closed the door, Naga reflected on the evening. He regretted his earlier outburst and resolved to be more understanding of Maya's cultural perspective. With a glass of scotch in hand, he hummed a Corean tune, hopeful for a fresh start in the morning.

GAZING AT STARS

July 11, 1965, 9 PM

It was a hot and humid Sunday. The sun had been beating down harshly the entire day, and there was no respite, even as the wind tried cooling its temper and the moon slowly nudged it out of sight.

Lost in thoughts, Subbaiah sat depressed on a wooden bench, under a dim incandescent street light, near the entrance gates of Madras University. Nearby, a throng of students encircled a makeshift stage, eager with anticipation. Above, the heavens played their nightly charade, clouds dancing around the moon as stars twinkled in silent mirth.

Oblivious to the celestial performance, the students' anticipation grew for the imminent arrival of their terrestrial luminary, the revered leader of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam.

It would not be long before Conjeevaram Natarajan Annadurai, fondly called Alaignar Anna, or simply Anna, would arrive to make a special announcement.

Subbaiah had the onerous task of organizing this meeting, and it was not easy. He had been asked to gather a few thousand students, but only around 100 had turned up so far.

The blame was not his to bear. MGR's cinematic spectacle, *Aayirathil Oruvan*, featuring the radiant debutante Jayalalitha, had captivated the city since its Friday premiere. The film's swashbuckling narrative had drawn the youth en masse to the cinemas of Madras. His students had lavished praise upon the film.

Though one might take such adulation for MGR's work with a grain of salt, Subbaiah found himself enticed. He had planned a late-night viewing with his wife, only to be unexpectedly summoned by his party to convene a student gathering for Anna himself.

A year ago, disillusioned with the state government led by Minjur Bhaktavatsalam of the Indian National Congress, he had enrolled as a primary member with the minor opposition party DMK, which had won just 50 out of 206 seats in the previous elections.

Till seven months ago, he was only one of the countless faceless cadres who devoted themselves to their party ideology, expecting little in return. However, January 26th changed everything.

Thanks to Subbaiah, the organized force of Madras students held back the imposition of Hindi, while the remaining victims from across the other southern states played safe, enjoying the ringside view. With all the party honchos behind bars, it was up to Subbaiah to organize the student protests and spark the agitations that rattled Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri.

Once the conflict was quelled, with Shastri's assurance of English's continued status, Subbaiah's pivotal role in mobilizing the students was recognized, and he was appointed as the State's Coordinator of Student Activities. This directive came straight from Anna, and an invitation followed for Subbaiah to meet with his leader to discuss an expanded role within the party.

Originating from the neighboring Andhra State, colloquially dubbed a *golti*, where the protests had not taken hold, Subbaiah surmised that the DMK sought his influence to extend its reach into his homeland. This would mean frequent travel or perhaps a position at Andhra University in Vishakhapatnam.

Now, nearly four months after all the drama and action, Anna's sudden decision to address students of his university today puzzled him. He wondered whether there were any new developments that he was unaware of.

Despite reading four newspapers every morning in the library and tuning in to the BBC Overseas Service in the evening, there had been no mention of any dramatic change in circumstances.

The imposing Senate House stood before him, its Byzantine-style architecture considered the finest of its kind in India. Yet, at this moment, it held little interest for him. His primary goal was to gather thousands of students for Anna's meeting.

As if summoned by fate, he spotted Ganapathy walking briskly ahead.

Pudukottai Ganapathy Iyer, his closest friend, colleague, and neighbor, taught Economics at the University. Unlike Subbaiah, Ganapathy avoided politics and remained mostly indoors during the recent agitation. Nevertheless, he served as Subbaiah's confidant and intellectual sounding board.

'Hello Subbaiah,' Ganapathy called out. 'What are you doing here on Sunday evening? Taking a solitary stroll along Marina?'

'Anna is arriving soon, and this is my first major event,' Subbaiah replied. 'He wants to meet students, but most of them are at Shanthi Talkies.'

'Ah, *Aayirathil Oruvan*! I watched the movie yesterday. Great fights, *thalaivar*! And that new girl is impressive. But why does Anna want to meet students now? I thought he gave up the agitation three months ago.'

'I have no idea. I received the order and am simply carrying it out.'

Ganapathy leaned in, his expression earnest. 'Subbaiah, I'm your well-wisher. These politicians play a dangerous and selfish game. They want to divide India for personal gain. Don't fall into their trap.'

Subbaiah sighed. 'Ganapathy, I understand your concerns, but that's not true. My party dropped the secessionist demand two years ago. This meeting has nothing to do with Hindi, anti-Brahmanism, or Dravida Nadu. Please don't argue—just help me now.'

Inwardly, Subbaiah knew that wasn't the whole truth. There was a growing movement against Tamil Brahmins in Madras State, blaming them for the oppression of lower-caste people. The 'self-respect movement,' which began before India's independence, still persisted. His party had inherited the legacy of anti-Brahmanism, albeit without the secessionist demand. The proposed new nation would include regions where Dravidian-origin people spoke Kannada, Malayalam, Tamil, and Telugu.

In November 1963, DMK dropped its secessionist demand in the wake of the Sino-Indian War and the passage of the 16th Amendment to the Indian Constitution that prohibited those who advocate separatism from running for public offices. Many other splinter groups continued to fight for it.

'OK. So, what can I do? Search for all students and force them to attend this meeting?'

Subbaiah shook his head. 'No, *da*. I need ideas.'

'Well, let's see. All the students adore MGR. Why not spread the word that he's coming here with Anna? You know MGR is a big DMK supporter. Once the students arrive, you can make some lame excuse.'

'Genius! Excellent! Wonderful!' Subbaiah exclaimed. 'I'll call Senthil right away. Can I use your phone? The University offices are closed.'

'Certainly. I'm meeting old friends for Chicken 65 at Mount Road Buhari, but Vijaylaxmi is at home. Go ahead.'

Subbaiah hesitated. 'Why Mount Road? There's a Buhari nearby. Is the biryani different?'

'No, *thalaivar*. I want to visit Higginbotham's and buy some books,' Ganapathy replied. In truth, his caste dictated strict vegetarianism, but he secretly indulged in non-veg dishes. The risk was lower on Mount Road, away from familiar eyes.

Subbaiah had longed to try Buhari's famous biryani since joining the university, but today's crisis took precedence. Ganapathy's phone was one of the few working ones on campus.

After a frantic dash to the residence quarters, Subbaiah returned, sweating profusely. The crowd had swelled, but not enough—maybe around three hundred. He had enlisted Senthil's support, using MGR as bait. The news would spread to other colleges, but rumors were hard to disseminate on a Sunday.

Sitting on the wooden bench, Subbaiah despaired. 'All my dreams of a political career are finished. This was an excellent opportunity to impress Anna, and MGR blew it. Why wasn't the movie released next week? I guess this is the end.'

Then, a low voice interrupted his thoughts. 'Excuse me, Professor Palli Palli.'

Subbaiah's gaze lifted to meet the cheerful visage of Moon, the new exchange student from Corea, accompanied by peers whose origins he guessed might be Assam or Nagaland. 'Hello Moon, how are you? Please, call me Professor Subbaiah. We're striving to move away from caste-identifying family names,' he greeted. 'How are you finding the weather and the food?'

'The heat is intense, sir, and the cuisine is quite different, but I'm adapting. We often visit Parry's Corner for noodle soup,' Moon replied.

Subbaiah nodded, aware of the Burmese-run eateries near Parry's Corner. 'True Corean fare is scarce in Madras, but Mount Road has several Chinese restaurants. I'll give you some recommendations tomorrow,' he offered, then inquired about Moon's social circle.

'I've made a few friends in the hostel, but none from my class yet,' Moon admitted.

'Give it time. Perhaps they're just shy. Wearing a lungi might help with the heat and mingling with locals,' Subbaiah suggested, though he knew well that

attire wouldn't bridge the cultural gap. Language was the true unifier among students.

The exchange students, hailing from diverse Asian nations, found themselves in an unexpected camaraderie with the students from India's Northeast. Yet, the divisions between those from China, Japan, and Corea were palpable, their rapport strained despite shared experiences.

'We heard there is some kind of a meeting here, and came to look.'

'Indeed, it's a pivotal student meeting. Do spread the word among your friends; their presence would be invaluable,' Subbaiah encouraged, gesturing towards a group of students who shared his features but bore a darker complexion.

A question about his Chinese and Japanese peers struck a sensitive chord, and Moon's response was tinged with bitterness. Subbaiah, taken aback, decided to delve into this matter later.

'You're familiar with MGR, aren't you? He's a cinematic icon here. He's expected to arrive shortly. It might be worth your while to stay,' Subbaiah suggested, hoping to distract Moon from the earlier discomfort.

Moon, still puzzled by the local fascination with a film star, nodded in agreement. Then, as if the universe conspired to validate Subbaiah's rumor, a thunderous cheer erupted. MGR had made an unexpected entrance, turning fiction into reality.

'There he is, Moon!' Subbaiah exclaimed, pointing out the star on stage.

Approaching the stage, Subbaiah encountered Senthil, visibly frustrated by the logistical challenge MGR's presence posed. The students were scattered, lured away by MGR's on-screen charisma at Shanthi Talkies.

Yet, the allure of the real MGR proved irresistible. Within moments, the crowd burgeoned to over two thousand, a mix of students, local merchants, and families who had sought a tranquil evening by the Marina Beach. Their chants for MGR—*Puratchi Nadigar*, *Ponmana Chemmal*, *Makkal Thilakam*—resonated through the air, a testament to his profound impact on the masses.

'What do these titles mean, sir?' Moon inquired, intrigued by the fervent adulation.

Subbaiah, pleasantly surprised by Moon's continued presence, explained, 'They're honoring him as the revolutionary actor, man with a golden heart, and darling of the masses. MGR is truly one-of-a-kind, a rare gem.'

In the midst of the excitement, Senthil approached Subbaiah with a beaming smile.

'Professor. Great job. This place is too small for everyone. I will inform Anna to come directly to the Beach. Why don't you tell MGR, and get all the students there?' he said, pointing across the road, at the glittering sand in the moonlight. Earth's natural satellite was waxing gibbous, and would be fully luminous two nights later.

'Me? Talk to MGR?' he stammered, not believing his ears. He was being told to talk to one of his idols face to face.

'Of course, I have no time. Anna should be here soon, and I have to wait for him at the traffic light,' Senthil said, folding his white lungi and scampering away. Subbaiah turned around and looked at the stage. A few party workers had formed a cordon around the superstar, who raised his folded palms above his head. Moon was not to be seen anymore, neither were his friends.

He made his way toward the stage, with the help of a few students who cleared the way, screaming: 'Professor Subbaiah coming. Make way!' Most of the crowd knew him, and it did not take long to reach the stage. He approached a party worker and whispered into his ears.

'*Apdi aa*?' the party worker said, leading him up the stairs and into the inner circle. Standing just a few feet away was the most handsome man Subbaiah had ever seen. Although he had a slight paunch and was slightly balding, MGR was the personification of manhood. Even his skin was different from ordinary mortals like him. It glistened in the dark. Rumor had it that he mixed gold dust in his morning cup of milk. No one could match his persona, except, of course, NTR, the Telugu superstar, who was Subbaiah's original idol.

'Wait here,' the party worker said, as he went forward and mentioned something to MGR. With his hair gently blowing in the breeze, a smiling MGR motioned for him to come forward.

'*Puratchi Nadigar*, it is a great honor to finally meet you,' Subbaiah mumbled.

'I heard you organized this crowd and forced me to come here at this late hour.'

'I am very sorry. Anna had something very important to tell the students, and they are all watching your latest movie.'

'Did you watch it? How is the new girl? Should I make more movies with her?'

'Yes, of course, first day first show, the story and action scenes were superb. So were the songs. You should act in more movies with her. She is very beautiful, and good luck for you,' he blurted, condensing his students' reviews.

'Well, a professor is never wrong. I will take your advice,' MGR winked. 'Sir, the crowd is more than expected. Anna wants to move the venue to the beach.'

'Is there a stage there?'

'No, but we can manage something. Don't worry about the crowd; we will protect you.'

'I don't need any protection from my fans. Let's go,' MGR replied.

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Half an hour had passed, and Senthil's efforts had borne fruit—a makeshift stage stood ready, facing a sea of over 6000 people. In a secluded corner, Anna, MGR, and other DMK stalwarts were deep in conversation, seemingly oblivious to the restless murmurs of the crowd.

Subbaiah's eyes scanned the notable figures: there was Nedunchezhiyan, the party's second-in-command, and Karunanidhi, the famed screenwriter whose pen had given life to *Parasakthi*, a film that not only catapulted Shivaji Ganesan to stardom but also carried the torch for the Dravidian movement's ideals. Karunanidhi's other works, *Panam* and *Thangarathnam*, resonated with Subbaiah, echoing themes of social reform and justice that he held dear.

'If only this moment could be captured in tomorrow's newspaper,' Subbaiah mused, regretting his oversight in not alerting the press. A single paragraph in *The Hindu* could amplify Anna's message, whatever it might be. The newspaper, a bastion of English journalism in South India, had the power to stir the public with just a few lines.

Fortuitously, Senthil had been more foresighted, and Subbaiah spotted a reporter from *The Hindu* among the crowd.

Standing a few feet away, Moon was puzzled, trying to make sense of this whole situation.

I can't believe movies play such an important role in driving public opinion. Thousands of people at midnight just to catch a glimpse of some stocky actor.

He had been warned about coming to India for his year- long exchange program. His economics professor at Corea University had advised him to go to a European country.

'Western Europe has so much to teach the world. The civilization is solely responsible for this advancement in human life and social welfare. Go to London or Paris. Do not choose capitalist America or communist Russia. Avoid China and Japan. Most importantly, ignore filthy and poor countries like India. You will only suffer and learn nothing. Their culture is different from ours,' Professor Jee Dong-hoon, a devout Buddhist, had told him.

Fourteen days after this discussion, and just two days before submitting his application Profesor Jee was dismissed by the university for plagiarism, fake educational credentials, and for claiming false expenses.

It is a sign that I should choose India. I should go.

He was almost regretting his decision now. The daytime weather was unbearable, with the temperatures touching almost 42 degrees Celsius. It was difficult to concentrate in class, trying to decipher the weird accents drenched in one's own sweat. He had to take a shower at least five times a day. Only the nights were bearable, outdoors.

His hostel room was no different. Unluckily, his roommate, Vinay Sharma, from the North Indian town of Ayodhya, had no sense of hygiene. Although he claimed to come from a rich upper-caste family he wore the same set of smelly clothes for days on end. The odor decapitated his senses and made him spend most nights in his friends' rooms, although it meant sleeping on the cement floor, with rats occasionally turning up to greet him.

The food was yucky and he threw up every time he ate at the hostel canteen.

They call it 'mess' here...it sure is one! They only serve vegetarian food, with that regular dish that looks like liquid ttong... and they call it sambar.

Oh, how he missed the four seasons in Corea, the pleasant smells, kimchi, kamzhatang, and soju.

I have to get out. Professor Jee was right. This is a filthy place.

His depressive thoughts were scrambled by the loud announcement through the megaphone. All his friends had left, but Moon decided to stay back out of curiosity. He did not understand a word, and was in no mood to hunt for friendly translators. He just stood staring at the stage.

'I thought you had left,' a voice startled him.

'Hello sir, you did not go on stage? I saw you with MGR before.'

'Of course not, only leaders do that. I am not one. By the way, where are your friends?'

'They got bored. I was also about to leave.'

'You better not. The fun is just starting. Can you see those three people with MGR? They are our leaders. All of them have gathered here to tell us something very important.'

'Sir, I have just one question. How can a film actor be a leader? Is he also a politician?' Moon asked.

'His full name is Maruthur Gopalan Ramachandran. He is not just an actor but also a social reformer and politician. He made his film debut in the 1936 and now dominates our film industry. He became a member of my party DMK in 1953 with the help of that short guy to his right, Karunanidhi, who is also a famous scriptwriter for movies,' he said pointing towards the stage.

'MGR adds glamour to our movement and is also a member of our Legislative Council. He is very charismatic, and has been responsible for the phenomenal increase in our party membership. A lot of young people are joining our fight to help the poor and bring social reforms. He is not just a famous actor but also a great leader in his own right, and personally offers relief in disasters and calamities like fire, flood, drought, and cyclones. He was also the first donor to the war fund during our recent war with China,' Subbaiah continued.

'Sir, I am still confused about your movement.'

'Our objectives include social equality, justice, and eradicating caste oppression,' Subbaiah summarized.

As Senthil handed the microphone to Anna, the crowd roared, and Moon stood on the precipice of understanding, awaiting the announcement that would shape his Indian experience.

OLD MAN AT THE SEA

Maya's morning began with a start as the persistent knocking on her door escalated. Disoriented, she quickly donned her nightgown and approached the door. Despite the air conditioning, the room's warmth had compelled her to sleep without clothes, a decision she made after double-checking the door's lock.

'Coming! Just a moment,' she called out, fumbling with the latch. Naga's familiar face greeted her, though the morning light cast him in a new light, making recognition a momentary challenge.

'Good morning, it's 8:30,' Naga announced cheerfully.

'Thanks, Naga. I'll be ready shortly,' Maya replied, clutching her gown.

'No rush. I've taken the week off to assist you. Breakfast is almost ready—toast and eggs for now. We'll try some local cuisine later.'

'Appreciate it, I'll be there soon.'

Seated at the kitchen table twenty minutes later, Maya eyed the charred toast and overcooked omelet with trepidation.

'Apologies for the toast; the toaster's seen better days,' Naga offered.

'It's fine, my maid back home often burns my breakfast too,' Maya responded, struggling with the salty egg.

'You have a maid? But aren't your parents professors?' Naga asked, surprised.

'Yes, they are. It's common in Corea to have household help—one for cooking, another for cleaning, and a gardener. Don't you?'

'Not really, only the wealthy have servants here. Most of us live in apartments.'

Maya pondered the contrast between the affluent Dravida and her own supposedly poorer country, where even average families employed domestic help.

'How much do you pay your maids?' Naga inquired.

'Let's see... 1,000 Corean won is about 10 US dollars, which is roughly 100 Deccan rupees,' Maya calculated, her attention diverted by a gecko scaling towards the ceiling fan.

'That's quite affordable. Here, a maid costs 10,000 rupees. Quite expensive, right?'

Maya barely heard him, fixated on the gecko pursuing a spider.

'Don't worry, geckos are harmless,' Naga reassured her, following her gaze.

'What if it falls?' Maya asked, visibly concerned.

'It rarely happens. But if it does, just hope it doesn't land on your head.'

Before Naga could finish, Maya shrieked as the gecko, missing its prey, landed on her arm and scrambled onto her plate.

'Get it off! Please!' she cried, retreating to a corner.

Naga calmly ushered the gecko behind the curtains with a newspaper.

'You'll get used to it. Geckos keep the insects at bay and are non-venomous,' he explained, addressing her discomfort.

'How can you live with such creatures?' Maya shuddered.

Naga shared the local superstitions surrounding geckos, known as *Balli Dosha Shastram*, where their landing spot on a person's body could signify good or bad luck.

'What does it mean if it lands on the right arm?' Maya asked.

'I'm not sure; I don't believe in such things,' Naga deflected, not wanting to alarm her with the romantic implications.

'So, what's the plan for today?' Maya shifted the subject.

'We'll have lunch with friends and then explore the city. Feel free to relax with the TV or newspapers; we have an hour before we leave.' Naga concluded, setting the stage for Maya's introduction to the city and its customs.

Maya observed the stack of newspapers on the coffee table and couldn't help but comment, 'Wow, how many newspapers do you read daily?'

Naga chuckled. 'I receive 12 newspapers—6 in English and 2 each in Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, and Sinhala. It's all covered by my office. Reporters can't afford to miss any news.'

Maya was incredulous. 'How can you read all these newspapers before breakfast? I can hardly manage one. Do you really know all those languages?'

Naga explained, 'Practice helps. You learn to spot the important articles and skim the rest. Plus, almost every Dravidian knows these five languages. English is our national language, but the others are official languages. In school, we're required to learn at least two languages besides our mother tongue and English.'

Maya remembered her struggles with learning English in school. 'Isn't that difficult? I mean, here students have to learn three different languages apart from English?'

Naga clarified, 'Not really. The five languages share similar grammar constructs and vocabulary. Only their scripts differ. It's akin to Corean, Chinese, and Japanese.'

Maya disagreed. 'Japanese and Corean are grammatically similar, but their vocabularies are very different. Mandarin and Cantonese also diverge. Besides, we're not forced to learn multiple languages in school.'

Naga defended the system. 'I'm glad we learn our official languages. It makes us complete. Look at Hindustan—Hindi is both their national and official language, even though it's the mother tongue of only 40% of the population. The remaining 60% know only their mother tongue and are compelled to learn Hindi. Very few know English, except in the Northeast states. Neglecting other beautiful languages is why some regions remain underdeveloped.'

Maya countered, 'That seems farfetched. The Soviet Union and European Union face similar language situations, yet they're developed. And one doesn't need to make English a national language to achieve development.'

Naga retorted, 'Who said the Soviet Union is developed? Their economic data is manipulated. They rely on military strength, which I doubt.'

Maya sighed. 'Let's not argue now. We can discuss this later with concrete data.'

Naga agreed, 'Fair enough. I don't want to quarrel on your second day here.'

Maya confessed, 'I'm still adjusting. English isn't my mother tongue, and you often misunderstand me. Translating from Corean in my head adds stress.'

Naga promised, 'I'll try to be more patient.' As his phone buzzed, he glanced at the screen, realizing it was an urgent call.

'Who is it?' Maya asked.

Naga gestured for silence. 'Good morning, sir... Yes, I read the Deccan Herald and Island articles. The document isn't genuine; it's a planted story to shake the markets... I'll try. I'm on leave for a week but will work on that angle from home... I have a guest from Corea, a family friend... OK, sir.'

Maya watched him, curious. 'Big boss?'

'Yes, my editor is quite vigilant about keeping up with stories in rival newspapers. The articles in The *Deccan Herald* and *The Island* sparked his interest

due to the corporate rivalry angle. I'm cautious not to get caught up in media traps,' Naga explained.

'Do you report directly to your editor?' Maya inquired.

'Not usually. I report to my bureau chief, but the editor takes a special interest in my work since his family owns the newspaper. They're also contenders for the upcoming 3G mobile licenses, which has been a hot topic in the media,' Naga shared.

'3G? As in third generation? That's impressive! In Corea, most of us still rely on landlines. Mobile phones are a luxury few can afford,' Maya remarked.

'The mobile market here in Dravida is incredibly advanced, with nearly complete coverage for our population. Mobile phones have overtaken landlines,' Naga said proudly.

'I've read about that. And I've heard about your world-leading internet speeds. Back in Corea, we're still on dial-up, which is why I couldn't use Skype,' Maya confessed.

Naga was surprised. 'Really? I assumed you were camera shy. Here, we have city-wide free WiFi—it's a new initiative by the government.'

'Could I get a temporary mobile phone? It's covered by my research grant, but I need it soon,' Maya asked.

'Absolutely, we can pick one up on our way to lunch with my friend Mathew and his wife. It's a quick process—just remember to bring your passport,' Naga assured her.

'Only 20 minutes? It takes two years to get a landline in Corea,' Maya said, astonished.

'It's a similar situation in Hindustan. But let's get ready; I don't want to be late for lunch,' Naga suggested.

'Give me an hour,' Maya responded, leaping up from the sofa, energized by the day's prospects.

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Naga was momentarily distracted from his iMac by the sound of the door. Turning, he saw Maya stepping out, her appearance strikingly different from the travel-worn figure he had seen before. She was stunning in a red patterned skirt and top, her hair cascading over her shoulders with a natural sheen, her face barely touched by makeup.

She approached him with a smile, a purse in one hand and a small package in the other. 'You're quick; under two hours,' he remarked, taking in her presence.

'Hope we're not late. I had to sort out my things. Also, I brought you something,' she said, offering him the package.

Inside was a leather wallet, personalized with the initials NP. 'Thank you. How did you guess I needed a new wallet?' he asked, genuinely surprised.

'It's a safe bet for a practical gift,' she replied with a smile.

'You look beautiful,' Naga complimented her. 'Just a second, I need to send an important email.'

'Work-related?' she inquired.

'Actually, it's for you. I'm arranging meetings with some professors. It'll help with your research and give me some story ideas,' he explained, finishing up on the keyboard.

'Then let's get ready to go,' she suggested.

Naga looked down at his outfit, puzzled. 'I am ready.'

Maya laughed lightly. 'You might want to update your look. It's a bit retro.'

'Fine, fine, as you desire,' he conceded, though his conviction that his attire was timeless remained unshaken.

'Ever considered a clean shave?' she inquired.

'What prompts the question?'

'You'd appear far more youthful. Give it a shot.'

'Ridiculous! In Dravida, a mustache is a badge of masculinity.'

'A mustache isn't necessary to affirm your virility,' she quipped, her gaze drifting to his trousers.

Naga's cheeks warmed with a shy hue, and he averted his eyes.

She's teasing again.

Maya persisted until he yielded.

Moments later, he emerged, his hand veiling his mouth.

'Let me see,' she urged, drawing his hand away. Their proximity allowed her to sense his breath on her skin.

'It seems peculiar. It'll draw laughter.'

'It's merely your perception; you're quite dashing. And it simplifies affectionate gestures,' she teased.

His phone's vibration interrupted them—Mathew confirming their lunch plans.

'We should head out,' he suggested, seizing the car keys and activating the security system.

Descending in the elevator, Maya's gaze was captivated by the view. The Bay of Bengal churned before them. She noted distant ships and a lighthouse to the right. Naga, behind her, admired her figure discreetly.

'I recall seeing buildings here last night,' she remarked.

'That was the West side; this is the east.'

'So, we're seaside?'

'In a manner, yes. We're in Royapuram, the historic north of Madras. The central beach, Marina, lies further, marked by that lighthouse.'

'Marina Beach, the world's second-longest?'

'Indeed, stretching 13 kilometers from our Parliament to Besant Nagar. Its breadth averages 300 meters, drawing crowds of 30,000 on weekdays and 50,000 on weekends.'

'I long for a swim. I've missed the ocean since my family moved from Incheon to Pyongyang.'

'For a swim, we'll find another beach. Marina's waters are too treacherous.'

'What good is a beach if one can't swim?'

'Nature doesn't cater to our whims,' he replied, pressing the car's security fob.

'Watch your head; the car's quite low.'

'And the favored cars in your land?' he queried, turning the ignition.

'Pony, Tico, and Pride,' she listed.

'Sounds like a musical trio. Corean models?'

'Yes, Hyundai's Pony is our inaugural mass-produced vehicle, now reaching Europe and South America. Daewoo manufactures Tico, and KIA, Pride—both Corean.'

'No foreign makes?'

'They exist, but the steep import duties limit accessibility.'

Import duties? Surely, she means customs tariffs.

'I wager your elite navigate in imported luxury, while the populace makes do with the likes of Pony and Tico. A socialist hallmark, isn't it?'

She conceded to Naga's point internally, yet her pride was wounded, and it was more than she could bear.

'Just so you're aware, we've been a democracy since our nation unified post-war. It's the will of the people, and we're content with that. Our priority is self-reliance and nurturing our own industries,' she asserted.

'That's a familiar refrain. But if you think your hybrid economy is the answer, you're deceiving yourself. Look at Dravida—always an open market since its inception, and look at our progress.'

'Each system has its strengths. One might say Dravida is merely a tool of the USA, a mere piece in a grander scheme of imperialism. And should the US falter, Dravida would follow. Remember the crisis of '97?'

'We've implemented reforms since then. That won't recur. And the US wasn't involved in that crisis,' he explained, referencing the sweeping changes post the '97 economic turmoil.

He remembered the *IMF Crisis* vividly, which nearly capsized Dravida, then the 11th largest global economy. He was a fresh correspondent for The Hindu newspaper at the time.

Dravida, like its neighbors, depended on short-term international loans and was vulnerable to volatile capital flows. When corporations began defaulting on payments, the currency markets went into a frenzy. The rush to exchange Dravidian rupees for dollars sent the currency tumbling, complicating loan repayments and spiking import costs.

The crisis had deeper roots, including excessive investment in real estate and speculative projects. The IMF's loans came with strings attached—structural reforms were mandatory.

Facing economic ruin, Dravida accepted a harsh bailout, resulting in the closure of major banks and industries and massive layoffs. Up to 125 prominent firms folded, and unemployment soared from around 2% to over 10%.

IMF suicides became a tragic norm among the jobless, and *IMF orphans* emerged as families in despair abandoned their children. The IMF became synonymous with the nation's woes, epitomized by the bitter slogan *I'M Fired*.

Yet, through sheer resolve, Dravida repaid its IMF debt by 2001, three years early. Within half a decade, the economy rebounded.

'We've learned our lesson; it won't repeat. The issue with communist states is their ideological inflexibility and failure to learn from history.'

'I've said it before—Corea isn't communist. We may align with China, but we have our distinct economic model and are sovereign.'

'Had I wished to offend, I might've dubbed Corea a vassal of China, as you did earlier. You do understand Dravida is an autonomous democracy?'

Oops!

Her smile flickered as she smoothly shifted the conversation.

'Your avenues are so spacious and pristine. Pyongyang and Seoul could learn a thing or two,' she remarked.

'Indeed, I've glimpsed photos online. It's the result of haphazard growth and graft. Our government prioritized land reforms over infrastructure. My neighborhood was once a disaster zone before independence—crumbling roads, dismal sanitation, and endless traffic,' he explained. 'But our inaugural President, MGR, revolutionized our cities, transforming the old quarters completely.'

'MGR was an actor, wasn't he? And all your leaders hail from cinema, correct?'

'Not entirely. Our first two Presidents, MGR and NTR, were indeed actors. But our third, Jayewardene, wasn't. Following him were actors RaajKumar and our current President, Jayalalitha.'

'So, Dravida has seen five Presidents to date?'

'Yes, and here, no one serves beyond two five-year stints. We have the conservative DPF and the liberal DDP. Only MGR and NTR, both DPF, served full terms, with NTR extending to 11 years due to the '93 conflict with Hindustan. Jayewardene and RaajKumar, DDP affiliates, each lost after a single term.'

'And Jayalalitha? Will she see a second term?'

'Difficult to predict. She's a peacemaker with Hindustan, yet the conservative bloc, holding the assembly majority, is formidable. Their next electoral hopefuls include actor Rajanikanth and journalist Narsimhan Ram. Personally, I align with DPF. Why seek peace when Hindustan remains a threat?'

'Why this fascination with film stars? They're mere performers, after all.'

'Why the disdain for actors? Each President has excelled, propelling our nation forward. They've been universally adored across all provinces. The US had its share of lawyer Presidents, and even an actor—Ronald Reagan.'

'You're right, a person's past shouldn't dictate their future. But actors, really?'

'Movies wield significant influence here. You'll see during your visit. I'll show you some films, and you'll understand. Over there is Madras Port, and straight ahead, India Bazaar and Parry's Corner.'

'India Bazaar?'

'Established in '69 for refugees fleeing Hindustan during our Civil War. Initially for Burmese refugees, it later expanded. It's a haven for Hindustani goods and cuisine, including age-old eateries famed for their Burmese noodle soup.'

'The soup's reputed to be exquisite.'

'Your source? Lonely Planet?'

'No, my father. He spent time here during his master's.'

'Did he mention Corea Town?'

'There's a Corea Town here?'

'Indeed. I've not visited, but it's said to cater to the Corean workforce with numerous eateries.'

'Do many Coreans work in Madras?'

'I'm unsure of the exact figures, but Corea's worker quota is around 2,000, mostly in Ambattur's factories.'

'So, Corea Town is in Ambattur?'

'Yes, it's a bit of a journey, but we could explore it over the weekend.'

'Thank you. I'd like to shop for some Corean delicacies.'

'Such as kimchi?'

'Yes, kimchi.'

'Look there, that's our Parliament building, Sriramulu Sabha. Formerly Fort St. George, renamed post-independence.'

'That was a fort?'

'Surely, you've studied the East India Company and British colonialism? The fort, erected in 1644, safeguarded their spice trade. Named for St George's Day, it quickly became a commercial nexus, prompting Madras' expansion.'

Maya, not fond of history, had little recollection of the East India Company or British rule. Her studies focused on Chinese and Japanese dominion over Corea. Best to feign knowledge.

'It's named after Potti Sriramulu. He was a visionary from Andhra who championed the cause of linguistic states when we were united with Madras. His hunger strike for a separate state led to his martyrdom.'

'So, his sacrifice sparked tensions among different linguistic groups in Dravida?'

'Indeed, but the civil strife unified us against a common adversary, Hindustan.'

'What if the provinces now seek independence?'

'That's unlikely. Our language policy ensures equality, and we rotate political leadership among the provinces to maintain balance,' he said, mopping his brow.

Despite Naga's plea for air conditioning, she insisted on soaking in the ambiance of Madras from the car.

'I've heard whispers of secession in Telangana?'

'Telangana's unrest is fueled by external influences. They share a history with Muslim rulers, yet they're an integral part of our Dravidian heritage. I believe they should remain a province within Dravida.'

'Some say they lean towards joining Hindustan.'

'That's a fringe view, not the majority's wish. We've even held a referendum, much like Sri Lanka's decision to join Dravida in 1980. Unlike Hindustan, which denies Kashmiris the same right.'

Confused, Maya shook her head.

'You're unfamiliar with the Kashmir conflict?'

'I am, hence my nod.'

'Ah, but here, a sideways nod is a 'no,' and up and down signifies 'yes."

She nodded correctly, laughing.

'Head nodding is a Dravidian courtesy, quite foreign to Hindustanis. Without our independence, our rich culture might have been overshadowed by theirs.'

'I've met Hindustani students; they were boisterous but not uncouth.'

'Our culture remains untainted by historical invasions. It's the essence of our identity—our arts, cuisine, and traditions. Had we not separated, the world might have missed out on our unique heritage.'

'Your culture stands out. Carnatic music, Dollywood, and your cuisine are celebrated worldwide.'

'Do you think so? Our global reputation is thanks to our professionals. Had we remained united, our diversity might have been overshadowed by cultural imperialism.'

She decided not to argue, though Naga continued passionately.

'Hindustan's expenditure on Kashmir has been wasteful. Thankfully, it's no longer at our expense. Had we been united, our contributions would have been misused by their politicians.'

'When will we arrive at Marina?'

'Almost there. I'll drop you at the entrance and park the car. Stay close and use my phone if needed. I'll be back shortly.'

•••

Maya stood on the sidewalk, the sun's glare feeling like an intrusion on her carefully maintained complexion. She worried her Corean skincare products weren't up to the challenge of Dravida's intense climate. Already, unwelcome blemishes began to mar her forehead. Naga had been gone for twenty minutes, and her patience was wearing thin.

Why is it taking so long?

As luxury cars sped past, she felt a twinge of fear—such traffic was alien to her. In the distance, a metro train clattered along its elevated track, resembling a metallic centipede. Across the street, the venerable red bricks of the University of Madras absorbed the sunlight. Behind her, a monument stood surrounded by a vast, well-kept park, its entrance marked by an arch reminiscent of elephant tusks. Nearby, the beach stretched out, lined with bustling shops and eateries.

Seeking refuge from the scorching heat, Maya headed towards the park, shielding her face with a newspaper. The park was a riot of color, with freshly watered flowers basking in the sun. Under a sprawling banyan tree, benches offered a cool respite. As she approached, the air seemed to cool.

She realized she was at a memorial. Annadurai? Wasn't that the airport's name? A perpetual flame flickered atop a monument resembling a tomb. The park was expansive, boasting a safari park, a nocturnal animal house, an aquarium, and a museum.

Couples whispered sweet nothings, lost in their own worlds—a stark contrast to Corea, where public displays of affection were frowned upon.

Choosing a bench with a clear view of where Naga had left her, Maya settled down. A loud gong from an old clock announced it was noon. Hunger pangs reminded her of the time difference between Pyongyang and Dravida.

Her stomach rumbled as she realized that it was lunchtime in Pyongyang. She had still not got used to the one o'clock lunchtime in Dravida.

Unfolding the newspaper, and spreading it across her lap, she hoped for some interesting articles to read. It was today's edition of *The Hindu*.

What boring news. Nothing makes sense.

She flipped through the pages and sighed, folding it again.

'Waiting for someone?' a shaky voice called out.

Seated on the bench in front was a thin old man, leaning on his walking stick giving her a crooked wrinkled smile.

'Yes. My friend is just parking his car right now.'

'Impossible to get parking here now, it is a working day. Where are you from? Japan?'

'No. Corea.'

'Corea? Oh, wonderful country. I have been to Seoul many times, taught a semester at Seoul National University. I used to teach at Madras University, retired 10 years ago.'

'Wow. What subject did you teach?'

'Development Economics. Where do you study? Madras University?'

'No sir. Corea University. I am doing my Ph.D, and came here for research.'

'Ummm... in Pyongyang? I know a professor from there. He was my student here a long time ago, just when the Civil war broke out. You remind me of him.'

'Don't all Coreans look the same to you? Most Dravidians do to me.'

'Ha, ha, you are right. Anyway, what is your research on?'

'Contradictions in capitalist societies born out of civil war.'

'That is interesting. I actually wrote a paper on it 20 years back. It may need updating.'

'Sir, can I have a copy of it?'

'It should be available in the University library. As I told you, I am retired now. I visit the library every afternoon between 1 and 4, maybe I can help you locate a copy.'

'Thank you sir, I am sure it will be helpful. Hope I can discuss my research with you. Oh, there is Naga,' she said spotting him on the sidewalk.

'Sir, nice meeting you, I will come to the library,' she said hurriedly, bowing her head deeply.

'Naga! Naga!' she shouted, turning around and running towards the sidewalk frantically waving the newspaper.

Noticing her, Naga waved his arms, gesticulating to hurry up.

'Naga, you just won't believe whom I met,' she said, panting as she approached.

'Sorry I am late. No parking spots. Maybe we have to come back later. Hurry, I just parked it on the shoulder,' he cut her short. They rushed towards the car, just as a police patrol car slowed down behind them.

'Sorry. Engine trouble. We are on our way,' Naga told the cops, who waved and continued.

Maya just stared. If it were Corea, the cops would have definitely demanded a bribe before letting them go.

'That was close,' he said. 'So, who did you meet, another Corean?'

'No, an economics professor who can help me in my research, he wrote a paper on my topic years ago. He also taught in Seoul.'

'What's his name?'

'Uh-oh. I forgot to ask.'

'Are you sure it was not someone hitting on you?'

'A 70-year-old man? I don't think so,' she laughed.

'Then how will you find him? Want me to go and ask, if he is still around?'

'No, that's OK. He said he goes to the university library everyday between one and four. I am sure I will recognize him. Moreover, I don't want to sit in the car alone. What if the cops come back?'

'As you say. We can meet him on the way back from lunch. By the way, did you go to that memorial out there?'

'No. I was waiting for you. Isn't Annadurai your father of nation?'

'We call him Anna, which also means elder brother. Yes, he is the father of my nation. When my dad was on the drafting committee of our Constitution, he realized that the original Indian Constitution did not permit any titles except educational and military ones, so he included a special provision. Although Hindustan claims that Gandhi is their father of nation, it is not con-

stitutionally valid. That was the spot where Anna addressed all the students, and gave the first cry for Independence. As a mark of respect, the eternal flame burns on the same spot.'

'You mean Gandhi was never legally the father of nation?'

'No, of course not, it is a myth perpetuated by the Hindustani school textbooks. After independence in 1965, Dravidians wanted a local father of nation and made sure that it is legally tenable. Globally, Anna may not be as popular as Gandhi, but he commands the same respect here,' he said. 'You know the irony? Gandhi is famous for his non-violence, and he is supposedly Hindustan's father of nation, one of the most violent regimes in the world today.'

'Naga. Can I meet anyone who fought in the Civil War?'

'I will try, have to ask around. If my father were here, he would have been the best man to give you insights. You know, he arranged Anna's meeting here that night. Let's ask the old man you met today. Hey, time to go now. Mathew must be waiting.'

Their conversation continued as they left the memorial and its eternal flame behind—a symbol of a nation's enduring spirit.

DAZED AND CONFUSED

Moon's eyes snapped open as a ticklish sensation crept up his arm. A gecko, its tiny feet barely perceptible, locked eyes with him. With a start, he flung his arm, sending the creature scurrying behind the closet.

He lay there on the dormitory floor, the fatigue of last night's events at Marina Beach weighing on him. The gathering had dispersed well past midnight, and now, at 10 am, the room was empty—his friends had already departed for their classes.

Aigoo! I've missed my morning lectures!

He grabbed his shirt, closed the door and hurried to his own room down the corridor.

Surprisingly, the door to his room was slightly ajar. He peeked inside to find his roommate Vinay sitting on the bed, sweating profusely.

'Hey, not well? Didn't you go to class?'

'What do you mean? There won't be any more classes. I saw you at Marina Beach with the other *chinkies* yesterday night. Don't you know?'

'Know what?' Moon replied, not wanting to pick up a fight with him for using the derogatory word.

'I told *pitaji* that I wanted to study in Delhi. Forced me to come here just because of that stupid scholarship, stingy old man. I hate these *rakshash*... dark low caste people,' he mumbled to himself in Hindi.

'Vinay. What should I know?'

'You might as well pack up. Anna has called for a boycott. The university's going to shut down again, just like last term.'

Moon was confused. He had heard of the violent agitation just before this term started, but everyone said it was resolved.

Last night, after Anna started speaking, he lost Professor Subbaiah in the surging crowds. No one was left to translate for him.

All he could make out was a lot shouting, jeering and whistling. Every time Anna spoke, the crowd hooted and raised their fists. It was as if they were hypnotized. MGR and the others spoke too, and got a similar reaction. Students burst crackers, played the drums and sang songs. A lot of policemen suddenly turned up and cordoned the area, but there was no violence. Moon imagined

they were celebrating something. Maybe the new MGR movie that everyone on campus was talking about. He mentally made a note to watch it with his friends and left.

But now, with Vinay's words echoing in his ears, he realized he needed to find Professor Subbaiah for answers.

He got up and left a sobbing Vinay in the room without saying a word, darting toward the Economics Department on the University campus, unwashed and unbrushed, he had to find out what was happening.

It took him 20 minutes to finally reach. The hostel was situated in the new campus, while the Economics Department was in the old campus. The classrooms were empty and the staff room locked.

Where is everyone?

Spotting a few of his friends huddled together under a tree, he strode up to them and enquired, 'What's going on here?'

'No clue, it's like a ghost town. Even the professors have vanished,' Andy Varte responded, handing over a set of keys.

'Vanished? What do you mean?' Moon pressed for clarity.

'It's like everyone's been drawn to some big event. Rumor has it there's a massive protest march happening at the fort,' Andy explained.

'So why are we just sitting around? Let's go check it out,' Moon suggested, ready to investigate.

Andy shrugged off the concern. 'Why stress about it? It's an unexpected break. Let's catch a movie instead. The new James Bond film just hit the Pilot Theatre.'

'Goldfinger? I've been dying to see it. Sean Connery's the best. Can't we just go later tonight?' Moon tried to negotiate.

'No chance. The evening slots are always packed. Now's our window,' Andy insisted, with the group echoing his sentiment.

Moon hesitated but made up his mind. 'Alright, you all go on without me. I need to figure out what's happening here.'

With that, Moon parted ways with his friends, determined to uncover the truth behind the deserted campus and the whispers of unrest.

•••

As Moon approached Fort St. George, he heard loud chanting and shouting. Drums were beating, just like last night. As he drew closer, the noise became louder.

Students carrying red and black flags had blocked the road to the building, raising slogans. Fully armored police were guarding the entrance. There were a few water tankers around. Some students had stones in their fists, others were holding hockey sticks and cycle chains. He noticed Professor Subbaiah standing at the far end talking to a few students, and rushed towards him.

'Sir. Professor Subbaiah. Excuse me sir!' he shouted.

'What are you doing here?'

'Sir, there were no classes. The university is empty. What is happening?'

'You were there at the meeting last night. You should know. Don't disturb me now. I am busy.'

'Sir, yesterday's proceedings were beyond my comprehension.'

'Oh, sorry, I forgot. It is not safe, there is going to be violence here, meet me in my office after lunch, I will explain everything to you. They have cheated us!'

'Who has cheated us?' Moon asked, still trying to get some information.

'Shastri and the Congress; they want to make Hindi the national language. We will not tolerate it. Now go. It is not safe,' Subbaiah said pushing him away.

Shastri. Congress. Hindi. National language.

Nothing made sense. He retreated to the university, anxious for enlightenment, the wait until the afternoon's appointment unbearable.

Fortune smiled upon him as he espied Professor Ganapathy, reclining in the cool reprieve of a bench's shadow near the Senate Hall. Slated to instruct him in Development Economics the following year, their acquaintance was but brief, initiated at the newcomers' reception.

With tentative steps, Moon approached. 'Good morning, sir.'

'Ah, Mr. Choi from Corea, correct?'

'Moon, sir. My given name is Moon-kyu, but here I'm simply Moon. And it's Choi, rhyming with 'pay,' not 'toy."

'Indeed, I recall now. Subbaiah spoke of you earlier today. He expressed concern for your dietary needs, inquiring about nearby Chinese eateries.'

'How thoughtful of him, especially amidst such turmoil.'

'That commotion?' Ganapathy gestured towards the distant din. 'Fret not. It's a fleeting disturbance. A similar scenario unfolded four months prior to your arrival. It's nothing of consequence.'

'What's the cause, sir?'

'It's a political charade. The anti-Hindi protests hold merit, yet they inadvertently bolster the ambitions of certain politicians. They're exploiting celebrity influence to foster discord and animosity among our people.'

'I must confess, sir, I'm still perplexed.'

'No, the fault lies with me. I neglected your unfamiliarity with India and its history, given this is your maiden voyage from Corea. Allow me to elucidate in terms you'll grasp.'

'Thank you, sir.'

'Let's begin with the essentials,' Ganapathy proposed, index finger aloft. 'You're aware that India was under British rule until 1947, akin to Corea's subjugation by Japan?'

'Yes, a shared history of colonialism.'

'While the British were oppressive, they weren't as tyrannical as the Japanese. It's often overlooked that the British mandates for cruelty were executed by Indian collaborators. In truth, the British played a pivotal role in unifying India, transforming a mosaic of self-serving princely states and the expansive Mughal Empire into a single nation.'

Moon offered a nod, his gesture one of practiced diplomacy.

'Consider Europe: a continent of diverse nations, each with its own language and culture. Yet, there's been talk of forming a European Federation in recent years.'

Moon nodded in acknowledgment, his mind revisiting the Treaty of Rome, which France, West Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg signed in 1957, birthing the European Economic Community.

'Picture a unified Europe, a single country composed of numerous member states,' he mused.

'Impossible,' came the reply. 'Their differences are too vast. They don't share a common language, and their history is marred by conflict, including the two world wars.'

'Indeed. India faced a similar divide until the British unified it. Now, it's not just talk; it's our reality.'

Understanding dawned on Moon. 'And if Europe were to unite, with German as the sole official language, would the others accept it silently?'

'Hardly. West Germany's 56 million people are outnumbered by the combined populations of the other countries.'

'Exactly. With 52 million in the UK, 50 million in Italy, 45 million in France, and 30 million in Spain, none had a reason to learn German. Yet, without it, they'd face discrimination in this new country, compelled to adopt a foreign language and culture dominated by Germans.'

Moon agreed silently.

'In India, of the 440 million people, only 134 million speak Hindi natively, about 30%. Including the 23 million Urdu speakers, that's 36%.'

'So, 74% of Indians don't speak Hindi or Urdu?'

'Correct. Making Hindi the national language would disenfranchise the rest. They'd be barred from government jobs and national exams, treated as second-class citizens.'

Moon recalled Corea's past under Japanese rule in 1939, when Corean culture was suppressed, and they were forced to adopt Japanese language and names.

'Our central government, dominated by North Indians, seems intent on replicating Imperial Japan's tactics on Corea. They might even force us to change our names for their convenience.'

Moon interjected, 'Wasn't there a language controversy even before independence?'

'The same issue. Tamils resisted Hindi imposition since 1938, paralleling Japan's cultural dominance over Coreans. The British allowed some provincial autonomy, but the ruling Congress Party repeatedly tried to make Hindi mandatory in schools, facing constant resistance.'

'It sounds like a justified protest. Why oppose it now?'

'It's become a political tool. Before 1947, Periyar rallied South Indians to seek independence from the 'North Indian Aryans.' Today, leaders like Anna and Karunanidhi twist this narrative, accusing the Congress Party of promoting Hindi to enforce Brahminical supremacy and caste systems. They claim to oppose India's division, yet their actions suggest otherwise.'

Moon had learned about the caste system in India; it was even covered in his history textbook back in school. He suspected that Professor Ganapathy belonged to the Brahmin community.

Suppressing his curiosity, Moon asked, 'What transpired in yesterday's meeting?'

Ganapathy replied, 'I wasn't there, and I'm clueless. There's no mention of it in the newspapers, and even Subbaiah didn't brief me this morning. I arrived to give my lecture and found the campus deserted.'

'Professor Subbaiah mentioned something about Shastri proposing Hindi as the national language.'

'Not again! Shastri assured us that English would remain an official language. He's a man of integrity; I don't trust those DMK politicians. Where did you meet Subbaiah?'

'He's with students at the fort, sir.'

'Really? If it's happening at the fort, it's more serious than I thought. Perhaps there's news on the radio. I need to speak to Damodaran in Delhi. I must head home.'

Ganapathy hurried toward the residence quarters, leaving the bewildered exchange student grappling with incomplete information.

Moon decided to return to the hostel and seek out Vinay. Why did Vinay mention going back to Corea?

He walked briskly, sweat dripping in the humid weather, reaching the hostel in less than 10 minutes. Vinay was still sobbing and muttering in an unfamiliar language, having just finished packing his bags.

'Hello, where are you going?' Moon asked, noticing the suitcase.

'Home. Where else?'

'Are you dropping out? It's only the beginning of the term.'

'What's the use? *Saala Madrasis* won't let us study.'

'Can you tell me what happened? I tried asking people, but the university is deserted. Everyone has gone to the fort.'

'Of course! No one wants to study; they just want to protest and eat idli-sambar. And for what? They refuse to learn Hindi. It's ridiculous—it's our national language, and they won't learn it.'

'But I heard that your Prime Minister assured that English would continue as the official language.'

'He's weak, a pygmy compared to Jawaharlal Nehru. A few stones are thrown, and he backs down. I wish Indira were our Prime Minister.'

'Who is Indira?'

'Indira? She's Jawaharlal Nehru's daughter, known for her strength, intelligence, and beauty. She's quite the contrast to Shastri, possessing the fortitude to confront challenges head-on. She carries Nehru's legacy and is seen by many as his rightful successor.'

Vinay, seemingly frustrated, questioned, 'Why would I come here if not for the full scholarship from Madras University? My father, ever so frugal, refused to fund my studies in Delhi, insisting I 'experience different cultures.' What nonsense.'

Moon countered, 'But isn't South India renowned for its intellectual community and rich, untainted culture? That's why I chose Madras University over Delhi.'

Vinay scoffed, 'You think so? That's a grave error. Here, the so-called intellectuals are nothing but pretenders from lower castes.'

Changing the subject, Moon inquired, 'What's the current situation?'

Vinay explained, 'Anna suspects Shastri might declare Hindi as the official language today. He believes that to be truly Indian, one must learn Hindi, or else they're free to leave.'

'That seems quite unjust,' Moon remarked.

Vinay replied dismissively, 'Unjust? This should've been addressed at independence. Hindi is spoken by the majority. The North fought for freedom while the South merely spectated.'

Moon objected, 'That's not accurate. The South actively participated in the struggle. And less than 40% speak Hindi, right?'

Vinay retorted, 'Majority rules. Why should we adopt English as the national language?'

Realizing the futility of the debate, Moon shifted focus, 'What's Anna's directive to the students?'

Vinay answered, 'A total class boycott. If Shastri announces the language policy, it could lead to a split, reminiscent of the American Civil War.'

Moon questioned, 'Isn't that an exaggeration?'

Vinay confidently declared, 'Perhaps, but the North will prevail. India won't be divided; the army will ensure unity.'

'And your plans?' Moon asked.

'I'm leaving on the 2 PM train. It's a good excuse to escape this unbearable city. You should leave too; there's likely to be unrest.'

Moon sighed, 'I can't afford the fare home yet.'

Vinay suggested, 'Ask your professors for help. As for me, I'll be transferring to Delhi. A little bribery goes a long way here.'

Moon, disheartened, agreed to join Vinay for lunch, hoping to experience North Indian cuisine before Vinay's departure. They discussed the local cinema scene, with Vinay expressing his fondness for Hindi films, particularly Dev Anand's recent hit, *Guide*, which Moon had read as a novel by a South Indian author. They planned to meet at a nearby restaurant, just a short walk away.

Exiting the hostel, the distant chants from the fort were audible. Vinay, with a smirk, suggested, 'Ignore those protestors. This way is quicker,' pointing to a narrow alley.

Moon remained silent, his thoughts preoccupied with hope. I must see Professor Subbaiah. He's my only chance.

Vinay broke the silence, 'We've never really hung out, even though we share a room. Why don't you sleep there?'

'I stay up late talking to friends; I wouldn't want to wake you,' Moon replied.

'Ah, those guys from the Northeast? They're lively, always up for a song or dance. They're fine with Hindi, but their beef-eating... that's sacrilegious,' Vinay commented, sidestepping a cow reverently.

Then, something odd happened. Vinay halted by a trash heap, drew a string from under his shirt over his ear, and began to urinate.

Moon was taken aback. 'Why the string over your ear?'

'It's a *Janeu,* a sacred thread for Brahmins. I keep it away from impurities,' Vinay explained, finishing up.

'Is that a North Indian custom?'

'No, it's for all Hindu Brahmins. The number of threads signifies different life stages,' Vinay said, detailing the thread's significance and the symbolism of the Hindu trinity.

'So, it identifies someone as a Brahmin?'

'Yes, it's a mark of our status, ordained by the divine,' Vinay claimed, lamenting the criticism of this tradition.

Moon reflected on the caste system's deep-rooted complexities and the resistance to change despite legal reforms.

'How do you know the gods designated Brahmins to lead?'

'It's written in the Vedas, our ancient scriptures,' Vinay asserted.

Moon pondered, 'Perhaps the authors were Brahmins themselves.'

Ignoring the implication, Vinay inquired about Moon's faith.

'I follow no religion,' Moon stated.

'That's unheard of. Everyone has a faith,' Vinay protested.

'In Corea, faith is a personal choice,' Moon clarified.

Vinay was incredulous, 'No religion? Impossible.'

Moon, growing frustrated but spotting a restaurant, thought, I can't wait for him to leave.

'Is that the restaurant?' Moon pointed ahead.

'No, this street is filled with *idli-sambar* and *halal* restaurants. Our place is just behind that building—the best vegetarian food in Madras. It's owned by a pure Brahmin from Allahabad, also a Sharma from my sub-caste.'

'Vegetarian? I could do with some pork or beef.'

'This isn't England. You won't find pork or beef here*, tauba*, *tauba*.'

'What about chicken?'

'Don't worry; it won't be like the sambar you get in the mess. Brahmins don't eat non-vegetarian food. I don't even eat onion and garlic. The food here strictly follows Vedic traditions—healthy and delicious. There's our restaurant.'

Moon cringed at the sight of the food laid out in front. It seemed like leftovers from yesterday. He couldn't imagine eating it.

I can even tolerate rice with sambar now. No wonder he is so fat and dumb. *Shikya*.

'Oh, I completely forgot, Professor Subbaiah wanted to meet me in his office. I am sorry; I have to rush.'

'Are you sure? Fine, I can finish everything. Just pay me your share; one rupee.'

Moon hurriedly placed a few coins on the table and fled. He made his way to the hostel mess, expecting it to be empty with all the students protesting at the fort.

Arriving fifteen minutes later, he was surprised to find it buzzing with activity. Even protesting students couldn't avoid lunch breaks. Looking around for

familiar faces, he was disappointed. Andy and his other friends were still out watching Goldfinger.

Moon chose a corner bench next to some local students who were arguing loudly. It was relatively the least noisy place in the entire room. They glanced at him briefly as he bowed his head and continued their discussion, ignoring him.

The rice and *sambar* tasted quite good today, and he actually enjoyed the flavor. Maybe it was the rebound effect from the disgusting tin shed food he had just escaped. He silently finished his plate and fled again, this time to Professor Subbaiah's office.

The door was not locked, but it was closed shut from inside. He put his ear close to the door and heard a radio. Taking a moment, he knocked on it hard.

'Professor Subbaiah?'

No response.

He tried again, knocking harder. This time there was a click, and the door opened.

'Hello, Moon, I was expecting you.'

'Sir, is everything under control?'

'Not yet. This is a historic moment; you are lucky to witness everything firsthand and will never forget it.'

'I don't understand.'

'At 2:30, our Prime Minister is going to address the nation and make an announcement that will impact the future of India as one country.'

'Sir, can you explain?'

'You've been here for a month now. I'm sure you know about the anti-Hindi agitation.'

'I have the basic information; Professor Ganapathy gave me the background in the morning.'

'Ganapathy might have left out certain facts he disagrees with,' Subbaiah noted.

'He did mention the agitation, suggesting that it's being exploited by some parties to stir caste tensions.'

Subbaiah sighed, 'That's a historical reality he often debates with me. The Congress party, though led by a Brahmin minority, wields significant power in India. Our self-respect movement aims to end this dominance.'

'But isn't the language debate separate from caste issues?'

'Not at all. It's intertwined. North Indians pushing for Hindi as the national language is understandable—they seek job security. But why would South Indian Congress leaders support this? It reeks of a Brahminical plot.'

Moon pondered, 'In Europe, you wouldn't see English or French politicians endorsing German as the continental language.'

'Precisely. If they're merely obeying higher-ups, they don't deserve our representation. We need leaders attuned to our needs, not those kowtowing to party heads. Even our chief minister from Madras is pressing this matter.'

'I recall a promise to retain English as an official language.'

'Yes, Shastri's promise. But within Congress, there are those eager to undermine him, using the Hindi issue to curry favor in their constituencies. Anna has heard they might unveil a new policy soon.'

'Doesn't Shastri have ultimate authority?'

'He's influential but simple, overshadowed by Nehru's legacy. Others, including Nehru's daughter, believe they're destined for leadership.'

'Isn't India's democracy meant to reflect the people's choice?'

'In theory, yes. But illiteracy and poverty allow a select few to sway decisions. Hindi is being used to weaken Shastri's position.'

'Sir, I noticed you use family names for North Indians, despite opposing such labels.'

Subbaiah chuckled, 'A keen observation. It's an unconscious habit, reflecting the cultural imperialism we oppose.'

'And if Shastri honors his word?'

'We eagerly await that.'

'And if he reneges?'

'Our agitation will resume. We're uniting with leaders from Andhra, Mysore, Kerala, and potentially Pondicherry and Goa. A collective stand might even draw support from Bengal, Gujarat, and Maharashtra. The central government would have to maintain English as the official language,' Subbaiah concluded, adjusting his radio's volume.

...and that was the afternoon news update. This is All India Radio. The current time is 2:30 PM. We regret to inform our listeners that Prime Minister Shri Lal Bahadur Shastriji's scheduled address to the nation has been postponed due to unforeseen circumstances. We will notify you

of the new time once it's confirmed. Please stay tuned for our upcoming program, Krishi Darshan.

Subbaiah expressed concern, 'Something's amiss, definitely not right.'

'Perhaps the speech will be rescheduled for the evening. In my country, the Prime Minister's broadcasts are typically in the early morning or late evening,' Moon suggested.

'You're correct, 2:30 isn't an ideal time for a national address. Yet, I can't shake the feeling that something's awry. Ganapathy might have some insight. Where did you last see him?'

'He was by the Senate Hall earlier, heading home to contact someone in Delhi.'

'I should visit him then.'

But before Subbaiah could act, Ganapathy burst into the room, breathless.

'Subbaiah, Subbaiah, urgent news,' he gasped.

'Ganapathy, you were just on my mind,' Subbaiah greeted him.

'I've spoken with my brother-in-law, Damodaran, from the Planning Ministry. Remember him from last summer?'

'What's the word? Any updates on the Hindi policy?'

'It's more startling—rumors suggest Shastri might resign, submitting his resignation to President Radhakrishnan this evening.'

'Why would he do that?'

'The Congress party is divided; Indira Nehru has formed a faction with the backing of 251 MPs, leaving only 110 with Shastri. With Congress holding 361 of the 494 seats, only 247 are needed to govern.'

'And the cause of this split?'

'Hindi, undoubtedly. Indira's group aims to establish Hindi as the national language, contrary to Shastri's stance.'

'Recalling the 1962 elections, weren't there about 96 Congress MPs from South India, and others from Maharashtra, West Bengal, Gujarat... Are you saying some non-Hindi MPs also support Hindi imposition?'

'Indeed.'

'It's disgraceful; they'll resort to anything for power.'

'Indira is poised to be declared the new Prime Minister this evening. She might address the Hindi issue in her inaugural speech.'

'Isn't she a Rajya Sabha member? Can she become Prime Minister without electoral victory?'

'The Constitution permits a Prime Minister from the upper house. Future leaders might follow suit, even if unelectable.'

'If she declares Hindi as the sole national language, the backlash could be severe, potentially worse than before. Today's protest might have been a mere warning, but we didn't foresee this.'

'Sir, should I return to my country? Vinay mentioned a potential civil war,' Moon interjected.

'Vinay?'

'My roommate. He's decided to return to North India.'

'Nonsense. We oppose another partition. The division at independence was catastrophic enough. We cherish our nation as much as anyone, despite our grievances, like the Kashmir issue.'

'And if your leaders push for secession?'

Subbaiah fell silent, and Ganapathy simply shrugged.

No one knew what lay ahead.

Whatever happens, happens for the good.

CLOSE ENCOUNTER

Maya settled comfortably in the car as Naga steered away from Anna Square, heading toward the Taj Coromandel—a five-star hotel known for its excellent restaurant choices in the city.

'Hope your friends are cool guys,' Maya said.

Naga shared, 'Mathew is one of my oldest friends in Madras. We were together at MCC during our bachelor's degree. In fact, we were next-door neighbors in our hostel, Bishop Heber Hall.' Suddenly, he burst into an impromptu song:

If you come to Tambaram, darling,
Come to Heber Hall.
Heber is a paradise, with its fish pond and all.
Ulunthuvadai, Masalvadai—anything you want.
Mess bills as big as hills—
Heber is our haunt...

Maya raised an eyebrow. 'What was that?'

Naga chuckled. 'Oh, that's our Hall song. MCC stands for Madras Christian College—one of the oldest colleges in Asia, founded in 1837. It had four hostels or halls, and Mathew and I were both in Heber Hall. It felt like a small country within the college, complete with its own anthem, traditions, and government. Heber Hall is located in Tambaram, about 40 miles from here. I'll take you there someday.'

Maya asked, 'How long ago was this?'

'Almost sixteen years,' Naga replied.

'And were you classmates?'

'No, Mathew studied Political Science, while I pursued Economics. Funny how we became such good friends despite having little in common. He's from Kerala, I'm from Andhra. He's religious, I'm not. He's smart, I'm not. He's an extrovert, and I'm not.'

Curious, Maya inquired, 'What about his wife? Did she also attend the same college?'

Naga shook his head. 'No, he met Ruby at his church.'

'Both practicing Christians, then?'

'More than that—they belong to the same sub-sect. They're Marthomites, part of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church. It split from the Malankara Church in 1842, which itself had broken away from the Saint Thomas Christian community in 1653 due to Portuguese influence. Their roots trace back to Thomas the Apostle's missionary work.'

Maya mused, 'So, are they Catholics or Christians?'

Naga clarified, 'Catholics are Christians. They were the original Christians in Europe before the Reformation in the 16th century.'

'In Corea,' Maya shared, 'Biblical Christians consider Catholicism a different religion, with distinct foundations and salvation approaches.'

'In that case,' Naga continued, 'Marthomites are Anglican, although only in a limited sense. Theologically and historically, Anglican Churches are Catholic.'

Maya raised an eyebrow. 'Are you sure?'

'Absolutely,' Naga affirmed. 'The term 'Protestant' is often loosely applied to them, but they don't fully fit that category.'

Changing the topic, Maya asked, 'You're Hindu, right?'

Naga chuckled. 'Not officially. I don't have any religion, but my government insists I'm automatically Hindu because my parents are. Even atheists remain Hindu by default.'

'In Corea,' Maya shared, 'we don't need a religion. While most are Buddhists, there's no pressure. It's not crucial for the government.'

Naga sighed. 'In my developed country, the conservative mindset persists, and basic freedoms are lacking. Atheist rights are completely ignored.'

The first criticism of his own country. About time!

'Hey, we were discussing Mathew and Ruby, your acquaintances.'

'Yes, I got sidetracked. As I mentioned earlier, they encountered each other at a church, developed a bond, and eventually wed.'

'What if she had belonged to a different church? Do you think they would have still married?'

'Why do you inquire?'

'I've heard that in Dravida, unions across religions and castes are uncommon. It's even rare for people from distinct regions to marry.'

'That's correct. Our society tends to be quite traditional in these matters, but there's a growing trend of young individuals challenging these norms. My mother, for instance, doesn't hold these conservative views.'

'And what about marriages with foreigners?'

'Dravidians typically don't oppose international marriages as vehemently as they do inter-caste ones.'

'That's curious. It's somewhat similar to the situation in my homeland.'

'How so? Your country doesn't have a caste system, does it?'

'In Corea, there's a widespread belief that we are a uniquely pure race.'

'Then why do you resemble the Chinese and Japanese?'

'Appearances can be deceiving. While many South Asians may share similar features, and numerous Dravidians might resemble Hindustanis, we are certainly not the same.'

'Indeed. Coreans might look similar to Chinese or Japanese to an outsider, but we are distinct. Our race is a defining aspect of our ethnic identity. We refer to it as *danil minjok*, believing in our ethnic homogeneity and racial uniqueness, attributed to our pure blood.'

'Pure blood? What does that mean?'

'We consider ourselves a pure race, descended from a singular ancestor.'

'Are you referring to Adam and Eve? Isn't that a common belief among Christians?'

'Our mythology traces our lineage to a bear.'

'That's quite an unusual belief.'

'Is it? Your pantheon includes monkey and elephant deities, yet you find our mythology amusing?'

'I apologize, please go on.'

'Our legends tell us that millennia ago, Hwan-ung, the son of a divine spirit, descended to Earth to establish a new realm. This land flourished, but a bear and a great Siberian tiger grew envious. They yearned for human life. So, they pleaded with Hwan-ung to transform them. He proposed a challenge: they could become human if they consumed only garlic and mugwort, secluded in a cave away from sunlight for a hundred days.'

'Is that the reason for the prevalence of garlic in your cuisine?'

'The tiger and bear accepted the terms and retreated to their cave. Impatient, the tiger abandoned the challenge after twenty days, but the bear per-

severed for the full duration, transforming into a woman. She and Hwan-ung wed, and their union produced Dangun, Corea's inaugural ruler.'

'Do you genuinely believe all Coreans descend from Dangun?'

'It's a belief that unites us. We distinguish ourselves from the Chinese and Japanese. To preserve our lineage, we traditionally marry within our own community.'

'And if someone marries outside the community?'

'Such mixing is frowned upon, deemed impure, and akin to the stigma associated with inter-caste marriages here.'

'Perhaps these customs served a purpose in ancient times, safeguarding communities. But today, they seem more like psychological barriers. Hindustan faces similar challenges.'

Not again. Why does he have to always compare Dravida with Hindustan?

'What do you mean?'

'Marriage is a personal matter. The government does not interfere here, and actually has laws to protect people who want inter-caste marriages. Dowry is also banned, and strictly punishable. In Hindustan, the people are on their own, might is right.'

'There must be some laws?'

'What is the use? Laws are only as good as their implementation. They have banned the practice of sati, but it is still rampant.

'What is sati?'

'It is a Hindu funeral practice in which a recently widowed woman immolates herself on her husband's funeral pyre. Most of the time the wife is forced by society to jump into the fire.'

So gross.

'Isn't that murder?'

'It is, but Brahmin scholars have justified the practice, saying that it is included in the ancient Hindu scriptures as an act of peerless piety, and purges the couple of all accumulated sin. It guarantees their salvation and ensures their reunion in the next life.'

'Does it happen in Dravida?'

'No, the South Indian Hindus do not follow this practice. That is why I said the Hindustanis are savages.'

'Why doesn't the government do anything?'

'By tolerating outdated religious practices, they can control their citizens and remain in power.'

'What do you mean?

'Hindustan,' Ganapathy began, 'is merely a democracy in name. In reality, it operates like a kingdom. Leadership is reserved for those with royal lineage—the Nehru family. Their current President is Sanjay Nehru, the son of Indira Nehru, who was Jawaharlal Nehru's daughter.'

Maya interjected, 'I recognize Jawaharlal Nehru. There's a statue of him near Pyongyang City Hall.'

Ganapathy nodded. 'Indeed, he was a remarkable leader, a true global statesman. However, the problems began when his daughter assumed control.'

Maya pressed, 'What do you mean?'

'In 1971,' Naga explained, 'after winning the war with Pakistan, Indira revised the Constitution. Hindustan shifted from a parliamentary democracy to a presidential system dominated by one party. Hinduism became the state religion, a move to appease hardliners and suppress opposition. Even before partition, she capitalized on her father's popularity by discarding her husband's name.'

Maya chimed in, 'So, there are no opposition parties?'

'Correct. The main opposition was the Jan Sangh, advocating Hindu laws. But Indira outmaneuvered them. Those who sought a return to secular democracy were imprisoned. Hindustan maintains political prisoner camps in the Thar desert.'

'And their parliament?' Maya asked.

'A mere rubber stamp,' Naga replied. 'Ultimate authority rests with the President. She skillfully played different regions against each other, leveraging the threat of war with Pakistan and Dravida to consolidate power.'

Maya questioned, 'What about elections?'

'They hold elections every six years for show,' Naga said. 'But irregularities, fraud, and obstruction of rivals are common. The United Nations and Amnesty International have documented this. Your country's friendship with Hindustan shields you from the harsh reality.'

Maya pondered. 'Maybe you're right.'

As they approached the Taj Hotel, Naga glanced at his watch. 'We must hurry; Mathew and Ruby are waiting.'

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'So what do you think of them?' Naga asked as he pulled out of the parking lot, an hour later.

'They were very sweet. I really liked Ruby.'

'What about Mathew?'

'He is a very funny guy. I did not get most of his jokes, only the one about your mustache was hilarious.'

'He is funny all right, and his jokes are great, you just have to know him better to appreciate them. He reminds me of Chandler.'

'Who is that?'

'Chandler from Friends of course. Don't tell me you never watched it on TV.'

'We have only one government channel CBS. Remember? Corea is not developed like Dravida.'

'Well, Friends is an American comedy, which ran for ten seasons and ended last year. It revolves around a group of 6 friends in Manhattan. Chandler is the funniest guy. His wise-cracks are hilarious.'

'Where to now?'

'Let us get your mobile phone.'

'After that let us buy some clothes.'

'You want some Dravidian silk saris?

'No, for you.'

'Me? No way. I have enough already'

'Please. I want to buy some clothes for you.'

'You are stubborn. Let us go to Nungambakkam.'

Great, time for a makeover!

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As they walked towards the University library, Maya marveled at the architecture. The pointed arches in granite and domes with octagonal base captivated her it was far removed from the grandiose Soviet style buildings in Pyongyang. Everything was so understated, yet classy.

Naga went to the reception counter, while she admired the various wall paintings that were on display. He returned with two 'visitors tags' and motioned her to come.

'The librarian was no help, as she has no clue of a retired economics professor who visits here daily. This is a huge place with hundreds of daily visitors we have to find your man ourselves. Will you be able to recognize him?'

'Sure. I think I can.'

'Let's start with the newspapers and magazine reference section. We can then try the Economics section.'

'As you say.'

The library was almost empty, with just a few students in sight. In fact, all of them were there only to catch up on the latest newspapers and magazines. The rest of the library, including the economic section was eerily quiet. No one was interested in dusting old books.

No old man in sight. Guess all the students are busy in the canteen.

'Are you sure he comes here every afternoon?'

'That's what he told me.'

'He lied.'

'Why should he? He seemed genuinely helpful.'

'I don't know. Lots of old people have fantasies of East Asian girls.'

'Please stop it.'

'Just kidding, let's go, maybe he is still in the park. We can walk across the road.'

'You are right. He looked very old. Maybe he just dozed off in the shade.'

'Hello young lady, you again,' a weak voice stopped them in their tracks.

They turned around to find an old wrinkled man sitting on the bench just outside the library doors.

'That's him, Naga!' Maya screamed.

'No need to raise your voice, it's very rude.'

'Sorry. That is the old man I met at the park.'

'You can call me Professor Ganapathy,' the old man replied. 'So you came looking for me?'

Naga strode up to him apologizing.

He looks very familiar. Have I met him before?

'Sorry sir. My friend is just excited. This is her first time in this country. She is from Corea.'

'I know, she told me. Very attractive, are you sure she is just your friend?'

'Yes, I am just helping her. My name is Nagarjuna, I am a reporter for *The Hindu*,' he replied.

'*The Hindu*? Boring paper, I stopped reading it. *Deccan Herald* is better. Who is the editor now, after Ram joined politics?'

'Mr. Venugopal is my editor. He is former editor Kasturi's son.'

'Yes, I know Kasturi, he was a fine editor. Ram made it a communist newspaper. I hope the younger generation improves the quality.'

'Sir, many people praise my newspaper for its quality.'

'Yes, I know. But it is always pro-establishment.'

'That is not true. Ram was anti-establishment. He exposed so many corruption scandals against Jayalalitha.'

'That's a misconception. Ram was a critic of the establishment, uncovering numerous corruption scandals,' Naga clarified.

'You're correct. He was an exceptional journalist, though his skills as an editor and politician were less remarkable. I've heard rumors of his plans to organize a peace summit with Sanjay Nehru in Delhi. Perhaps he's eyeing the Nobel Peace Prize. This time, my vote is firmly for Rajanikanth.'

Interrupting the flow of pessimistic conversation, Maya spoke up, 'Sir, might I trouble you for a copy of your article?'

'Oh, certainly. But I must caution you, it's quite dated, and the context has shifted significantly since then.'

'I value your perspective. Has it evolved over time?'

'Not in the slightest. Let's head to the library,' he suggested, rising from his seat.

'Sir, when did you conclude your teaching career?' inquired Naga.

'A decade past. I dedicated thirty years to teaching here. The memories are cherished, which is why I return daily.'

'Were you present for the Great Protest?'

'Indubitably. It's unforgettable.'

'Then you must have known Professor Subbaiah?'

'Professor who?'

'Professor Subbaiah, the orchestrator of the student demonstrations.'

'I can't seem to recall anyone of that name.'

'But how? He's renowned as a freedom fighter and once led the Economics Department.'

'Lower your voice, young man. My recollection is intact, and that name doesn't ring a bell. Anna and MGR were our champions of liberty,' he admonished. 'I'm feeling unwell. Would you mind giving me some space?'

'But, sir, about your article...' Maya persisted.

'You can look it up yourself. Search for P. Ganapathy Iyer,' he instructed, departing briskly without a backward glance.

'What upset him? Did I say something wrong?'

'It's unclear, perhaps he genuinely doesn't recall your father.'

'That's impossible. They should have been peers, it's quite peculiar. My father was part of the university from '64 to '75, in the very same department.'

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'Locating his article wasn't difficult. Professor Ganapathy's publications filled an entire shelf,' Maya remarked, securing her seatbelt in the car.

'Indeed, he's written extensively. Yet, it baffles me why he'd feign ignorance about my father. His biography explicitly mentions his appointment to the department in January '65, during my father's tenure as department head.'

'Remember, he's elderly. Their recollection can falter. Perhaps it's Alzheimer's.'

'I'm determined to uncover the truth. It's essential.' 'Let's head home, Naga. I'm exhausted and yearning for a restful nap.'

'Agreed, I'm weary as well. But where have I encountered him before? He seems so recognizable.'

'Whom are you referring to?'

'Professor Ganapathy.'

'You mean you've met him previously?'

'Yes, but the context eludes me.'

'Just as he claims to have forgotten your father,' she chuckled.

'Maya, please, no levity now. This matter is serious.' 'Why not delve into his past online?'

'That's my intention. Additionally, I'll consult with university officials for further insights.'

'After perusing his article, I wish to speak with him again. There might be points needing clarification.'

'Proceed with that. Approach him solo since he appears displeased with me. Meanwhile, I'll investigate his history, which you can verify later.'

•••

Naga tirelessly scoured Google, while Maya indulged in some well-deserved downtime.

Searching for 'P. Ganapathy Iyer' yielded a staggering 1.4 million results. Yet, after sifting through the initial pages, he abandoned the effort. Not one result was pertinent—merely a collection of links to various articles and discussions. Narrowing the search to 'P.Ganapathy Iyer Madras University' brought up 96,000 entries, and adding 'Economics Department' to the mix resulted in 94,000 hits. Still, his detailed profile remained elusive. It seemed Google's search capabilities were due for an enhancement.

Frustrated, he attempted to navigate the Madras University website, but to no avail. In a mix of resignation and desperation, he powered down the computer and fetched a cold beer from the fridge.

Reflecting on the day's events, he couldn't help but feel a sense of satisfaction. Maya wasn't just strikingly attractive; she was also bright and inquisitive—a combination he admired. The only hiccup in his musings was her apparent lack of romantic interest. However, her playful banter in previous emails gave him a glimmer of hope. He was convinced there was a chance for something more. It was clear to him: he needed to initiate the next step—and swiftly.

THE FIRST SUPPER

Subbaiah felt weary. It had been nearly a week since Shastri's resignation, and Indira Nehru had swiftly taken his place. Yet, an unsettling silence hung over the official language policy. The new government was preoccupied with finalizing cabinet portfolios, leaving no room for mundane language matters.

The confusion was palpable. Without a clear announcement, dissent remained stifled. English, still an associate language, held its ground due to Shastri's promise. But Subbaiah and the top leaders of DMK sensed more at play. Indira had outmaneuvered them, deliberately withholding specifics. Everyone understood that with this change of leadership, Hindi would inevitably become the sole national language. Still, they lacked the details needed for effective protest.

Students returned to their classes, and daily life resumed as if nothing had shifted. Subbaiah leaned against a roadside kiosk near the university gates, pondering the situation. 'I'm sure she'll spring a surprise announcement,' he mused aloud.

Each morning, after the initial two classes, Subbaiah met Ganapathy at the staff canteen for tea and casual conversation. Today, however, the scorching sun drove them to seek solace in refreshing tender coconut water. They discussed multinational companies like Coca Cola, which had begun infiltrating India. Both agreed that the country wasn't yet ready for fully foreign-owned enterprises. Despite this, the government allowed minimal investments by such companies, allowing them to repatriate substantial profits.

Changing topic, Ganapathy took a sip of his Ilaneer and asked, 'What's DMK's plan?'

Subbaiah shrugged. 'No orders from headquarters. Anna's off to Andhra and Mysore, meeting local leaders.'

'Definitely not Congress leaders, I assume?'

'Of course not. Anna aims to forge a coalition of opposition parties, gearing up for a larger protest. Today, he meets N. G. Ranga, co-founder of the Swatantra Party, in Hyderabad.'

The Swatantra Party, founded by Chakravarti Rajagopalachari aka Rajaji and N. G. Ranga in August 1959, staunchly opposed socialist Congress policies. Advocating free enterprise and trade, it had secured significant votes, emerging as the largest opposition party in Parliament.

'But Rajaji himself once pushed for Hindi during his tenure as Chief Minister of Madras in 1938,' Ganapathy remarked.

'True,' Subbaiah replied. 'But times have changed. He now stands with Anna, taking a strong anti-Hindi stance. If Ranga agrees, Andhra will join our protests.'

'And what about Mysore and Kerala?'

'Anna and the others will engage local leaders, even if it means dialoguing with communist parties. Remember, EMS, the first non-Congress Chief Minister of Kerala, despises the Congress.'

His dismissal by the Central Government in 1959, invoking Article 356, sparked the Liberation Struggle. It all began with an Education Bill in Kerala that threatened educational institutions financially aided by the government. Massive rallies and demonstrations echoed throughout the state, spearheaded by the Catholic Church. Nehru seized the opportunity to dismiss the government.

'They hold communist beliefs, which starkly contrast with the Swantara party's ideology. Do you reckon they'll cooperate?' Ganapathy wondered.

'I believe they'll set aside their differences and join forces; after all, politics often creates unlikely alliances. Also, remember that it was Indira who orchestrated EMS's removal from the Chief Minister's Office. He's probably eager for retribution.'

'Subbaiah, I must leave now; I have a lecture to attend. Is your dinner invitation still open?'

'Absolutely, we're looking forward to having you and Vijaylaxmi over at about 7:30. Please remember to bring your camera. I'm done with classes for the day, so I plan to spend some time at the library,' he remarked, discarding his finished coconut into a bamboo basket.

•••

'Hello Moon, are you looking for anything specific?' Subbaiah inquired, observing his difficulty with the index cards in the library's catalog area.

'Yes, sir, I'm seeking books on Indian history. I've noticed that, unlike Coreans who are a single ethnicity, everyone here is so diverse; there are numerous languages, and people's appearances vary greatly, yet they all belong to one nation. I'm eager to learn about your country's past and comprehend how it managed to unite so many distinct ethnicities.'

'We owe that to the British,' he replied.

'That's exactly what Professor Ganapathy mentioned recently, and it piqued my interest.'

'It's widely believed that if not for British governance, we would have become separate nations, governed by self-serving monarchs. Are you aware that we still provide them with a regular income?'

'I'm not following.'

'After Britain relinquished control over India, over 565 princely states across the subcontinent were governed by individual treaties. Many rulers gave up their sovereignty in exchange for an annual stipend, known as privy purses, along with other benefits.'

'I was under the impression that India is a republic. Do they continue to receive a yearly income from the state?'

'India is indeed a republic, but the royal families still wield significant political influence. It's high time this practice was discontinued. A law should be enacted to eliminate privy purses and officially recognize titles; only then can we assert ourselves as a genuine democracy.'

'Were the Indians content under British rule?'

'No, certainly not. Like any colonial power, they prioritized their own interests and exploited us, yet inadvertently they united us—akin to finding a silver lining in a dark cloud.'

'It's unexpected to hear you speak positively of the British. In my homeland, we despise the Japanese for their 35-year occupation, even though they contributed to our infrastructure development.'

'I understand, and that's probably why you were offended when I asked if you had Japanese and Chinese friends. Your resentment towards the Japanese is clear, but why also the Chinese?'

'For centuries, various Chinese dynasties treated Corea as a vassal state and mistreated us. They still claim vast areas of our nation as their own, even today.'

'That's ancient history. Currently, your government maintains cordial relations with Mao.'

'It's a strategic move to diminish Japan's influence in our region; aligning with America isn't an option. Despite our government's political decision to strengthen ties, Coreans deep down remain wary of the Chinese, recalling the 300,000 troops China dispatched during the Corean War to support Kim Il Sung.'

'Had the United Nations, spearheaded by the Americans, not intervened, Kim might have ruled your nation.'

'Indeed, and we would have reverted to being a Chinese tributary. Fortunately, we overcame the communists and reunified our country.'

'I recall being in London during the Corean War. Back then, your country was spelled with a *K*, and many thought it would fragment like Germany.'

'Originally, we spelled it with a *C*, but the Japanese altered it to precede us alphabetically. We reverted to the original spelling post-war.'

'It's fascinating to consider,' Subbaiah mused, 'how close we came to a different world. If President Truman had heeded his advisors' counsel to dismiss General MacArthur, we might have seen Corea under communist rule, or perhaps two Coreas, both starting with *K*.'

He continued, 'The Corean War, ignited by Kim Il Sung's invasion of the South in June 1950, saw General Douglas MacArthur lead the United Nations forces. His ingenious Incheon landing turned the tide, forcing the North to retreat. Yet, China's entry prolonged the conflict. By April 1951, with the situation stable, MacArthur sought to reclaim the North, even considering nuclear options. Truman's advisors, wary of MacArthur's rising domestic influence and unilateral decisions, contemplated his dismissal. Ultimately, MacArthur secured victory with conventional warfare, unifying the peninsula by July 1953.'

'Yes, sir,' Moon acknowledged, 'but at a terrible cost. Our nation lay in ruins, lives lost innumerable.'

'War invariably brings such tragedy,' Subbaiah lamented. 'Civilians bear the brunt, not just the armies or their leaders.'

Moon interjected, 'Could India face a similar crisis over language disputes?'

'We strive for peace,' Subbaiah replied. 'Much depends on Anna's negotiations and, crucially, our Prime Minister.'

Curious, Moon asked, 'Isn't your new Prime Minister the world's first female leader?'

Subbaiah corrected him, 'No, that honor goes to Sirivamo Bandaranaike of Ceylon in 1960. Indira, however, ascended without election, leveraging her lineage.'

'What do you mean?'

'India's parliament is bicameral,' Subbaiah explained. 'The Lok Sabha members are elected, while the Rajya Sabha's are party-nominated. Indira's nomination was due to her heritage.'

'Is that legal?'

'Legal, yes, but ethically dubious to become Prime Minister unelected.'

'And if she wins an election?'

'Then I'll retract my criticism and respect her. For now, her quest for power seems driven by a desire to match Bandaranaike's legacy.'

'Shouldn't she be given a chance to prove herself?'

'Perhaps,' Subbaiah conceded, 'but the rumored imposition of Hindi has us on edge.'

'It's been a week without word,' Moon pointed out.

'That's our concern,' Subbaiah admitted. 'She knows protests would erupt with any announcement. A surprise move seems likely; it's a matter of when, not if.'

'I neglected to inquire earlier, but in case of unrest, how would I return to my homeland? The university's policy is to provide a flight ticket only at term's end.'

'Rest assured, significant turmoil is unlikely. Once the southern states consolidate, opposition will diminish.'

'My concern is the potential for civil conflict. Having endured one already, the prospect of another in a foreign land is daunting.'

'Fret not, Moon. Should the university shut down abruptly, we'll devise an exit strategy. In dire circumstances, my campus residence, which is spacious and underutilized, could serve as your sanctuary.'

'Thanks, Professor. I trust Mrs. Subbaiah wouldn't object.'

'Malathi would welcome the idea. In fact, why not join us for dinner this evening? It's a chance to escape the canteen fare and make introductions.'

'Your offer is generous, Professor.'

'Anticipate a departure from noodle soup and other Eastern cuisine. Instead, savor the vegetarian delicacies of my region, courtesy of my culinary adept spouse, who abstains from meat. Ganapathy and his spouse are also expected guests. My abode is marked A8, easily located.'

'Understood, Professor. I shall arrive at 6 PM.'

'Six is premature; Malathi's culinary endeavors commence later.'

'My apologies, I forgot. Dinner in Corea customarily occurs at 6 PM. I'll adjust to eight.'

'Arriving at 7:30 would be ideal. Should you opt for an earlier visit, my library is at your disposal.'

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Moon made his way back to the dormitory, eager for a respite from the day's demands. Opting out of the lecture on Marxist Economic Theory seemed inconsequential; the soporific effect of *Das Kapital* was all too familiar, and he was confident in his ability to prepare for the exams.

A week had passed since Moon reclaimed his bed, and the comfort it brought was unparalleled. The room had been his alone since Vinay's abrupt departure; a thorough cleaning had banished the odd odor that once lingered. Gone were the nights on Andy's floor—now, his room had become the favored hangout, a clandestine tavern where friends gathered, local spirits in tow.

Andy hailed from Nagaland, a predominantly Christian state in Northeast India, where homemade rice liquor was a tradition. For his time in Madras, he'd come prepared, a suitcase brimming with *zutho* bottles.

Moon's first encounter with *zutho* was a pleasant surprise; its taste reminiscent of *makgeolli*, his second-favorite drink. But *soju*, with its potent kick, remained his top choice for a swift and economical buzz.

Despite Andy's caution to ration the *zutho*, restraint was forgotten once the drinking commenced.

Initially, Moon was taken aback by the university's abstemious atmosphere. In Corea, alcohol was a staple of social gatherings, enjoyed by families and friends alike. Here, it seemed a pastime reserved for foreign students and those from the Northeast. He learned that for many Hindus, alcohol was taboo, a sin not indulged in by the devout.

The evening's plan was to indulge in *zutho* and sample some *ganja* acquired near Madras Central station.

Approaching his room, Moon found the door ajar. Anticipating Andy's presence, he was instead greeted by the unwelcome return of that peculiar smell.

Vinay was back, derailing their plans. Moon quickly composed a note for Andy.

'Hi, you're back? I thought you were off to Delhi,' Moon inquired, eyeing Vinay.

'My father reconsidered the expense, given the calm at home. He's sent me back,' Vinay explained.

'So, you'll finish the term?'

'Yes, it seems I must. But this room—what have you done? And those bottles?'

'They're herbal remedies from Andy's village.'

'All those bottles? And that smell?'

Moon thought, If only you knew it's you.

'Perhaps a rat died in here... I need to find Andy; he has my notes.'

'Alright, see you at dinner. Triplicane again?'

'No, I've got plans.'

'With whom?'

'Andy and some others. We're trying a new Chinese place on Mount Road,' Moon fibbed.

'Chinese cuisine? I've heard they eat snakes and dogs. Disgusting. Do you?'

'What about me?'

'Do you eat such things?'

'The flavors are exquisite. You might consider trying it. There's no shortage of snakes and dogs here. I could even prepare a dish for you,' Moon retorted, aiming to unsettle Vinay.

While snake is touted for its health benefits and aphrodisiac qualities in Chinese culture, it's less common in Corea. Dog meat, however, is a revered delicacy there.

'How can you eat dogs? They're man's best friend.'

'The meat is delectable, far superior to chicken or beef. I don't critique your diet, so refrain from judging mine,' Moon countered firmly.

'Barbarians,' Vinay began, 'I wonder how your Indian Queen tolerated the nasty food.'

'What do you mean, my Indian Queen?' Moon inquired.

'The priest at my family temple shared a fascinating tale. An Indian princess from my hometown supposedly journeyed to your country 2,000 years ago and married your King. She became the first Queen of your land, making Coreans half-Indian. That's why you're better looking than the Chinese, hee hee,' he chuckled.

Moon raised an eyebrow. 'What a fantastical story. Do you genuinely believe it?'

'Absolutely! It's even recorded in your oldest history book.'

'I see. You're referring to Queen Heo Hwang-ok, the first queen of the Gaya Dynasty. However, the Samguk Yusa states that a princess traveled by boat from Ayutthaya in Thailand, not my hometown in India. She came to marry King Suro, who ruled a small kingdom in Corea—not my entire country.'

'But there's a temple in my hometown that also mentions the queen. I'm convinced she hailed from Ayodhya.'

'Can you truly believe that an Indian princess had a dream and traveled thousands of kilometers across the seas to marry someone she'd never met? They had nothing in common—not even their food or language. Perhaps she was merely his concubine.'

'I don't know,' Vinay replied. 'My priest told me, and I trust him. After all, a Brahmin knows everything.'

'Then why don't you seem to know anything?' Moon teased.

'Believe what you wish. India boasts a 5,000-year-old history, and my ancestors conquered much of the world, including Corea.'

'Typical arrogance,' Moon retorted. 'Just like the Chinese. A nation's greatness lies not solely in its history but in what its people achieve in the present.'

'You'll witness it soon,' Vinay asserted. 'India will become a superpower under Indira. Anyway, I'm tired and need rest. A group of *Madrasis* sat next to me on the train, farting all night. Enjoy your Chinese food with the other *chinkies*, and spare me the details when you return.'

Relieved, Moon departed to find Andy and share the unfortunate news.

'Our secret bar is closed,' he lamented.

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Locating Professor Subbaiah's abode proved to be a simple task. As Moon stood at the threshold, the sound of laughter filtered through the curtains, hinting at a lively gathering within.

This joviality suggested that the language policy remained unchanged, and Moon harbored a silent hope that the new Prime Minister would forgo its announcement. In the absence of a doorbell, he resorted to a courteous double knock.

'Ah, you've made it. Was the journey here smooth?' Subbaiah welcomed him warmly as the door swung open.

'Greetings, sir. Forgive me for coming empty-handed,' Moon apologized.

'No formalities needed here; make yourself at home,' Subbaiah assured him.

Stepping inside, Moon noticed Ganapathy comfortably settled in a cane chair, fiddling with a camera.

'Good to see you, professor,' Moon greeted.

'All is well with you?' Ganapathy inquired.

'Indeed, sir. Is that a camera you're handling? Subbaiah mentioned needing family photos.'

'Yes, it's a Rolleiflex TLR, a top-tier German model,' Ganapathy noted.

'Really? It was a gift from my wedding two years ago. My nephew snapped a few pictures then, but it's mostly been idle. I reckon there's space for four more shots on this roll.'

'My father has a similar model. It's a professional camera, and I learned its workings early on. The upper lens is for framing and focusing, while the lower one takes the shot.'

'Perfect, you can assist us with the photos then. Malathi, could you and Vijaylaxmi step away from the kitchen for a moment?' Subbaiah called out.

'What's happening?' Malathi asked as she appeared with Vijaylaxmi, Ganapathy's wife.

'Our guest from Corea has just arrived,' Subbaiah announced with a smile.

'Moon, meet my wife, and this is Mrs. Ganapathy.' Both women exuded the aura of traditional homemakers.

'Greetings, ma'ams,' Moon responded, joining his hands in a respectful *namaskaram*.

'Subbaiahgaru has spoken of you,' Malathi acknowledged, her tone deferential. She always addressed her husband with respect, adding *garu* to his name in the presence of others.

'He's going to photograph us,' Subbaiah explained to her. 'You've been wanting to visit a studio, but Ganapathy has kindly offered his camera.'

Moon examined the camera, comparing it to the one his father owned. It was indeed the same model. Soon, he captured three images in front of the large painting adorning the wall. The first featured Subbaiah and Malathi, the second showcased Ganapathy and Vijayalaxmi, and the final one included all four of them.

'Developing these photos can be pricey,' Ganapathy mentioned. 'I'll head to a discount studio in Guindy; we should have the prints in a week.'

'Let's take one last picture on this roll,' Subbaiah suggested, considering Moon's perspective. 'Perhaps one with all three of us men.'

'Malathi, would you mind taking it for us?' Subbaiah asked.

'I'm not sure how to operate it,' Malathi hesitated.

'Moon will guide you,' Subbaiah assured her. 'Just hold the camera steady and press this button.'

After a quick tutorial, Malathi apprehensively snapped the photo, capturing Subbaiah, Ganapathy, and Moon together beneath the painting, with Subbaiah positioned in the middle. Moon couldn't help but silently critique the artwork.

'Sir, who is the artist of this painting?' Moon inquired.

'That was a wedding gift from a student in Bombay,' Subbaiah explained. 'It's titled Maiden Flight, created by an artist named Hussain.'

'Do you have an interest in art?' Moon asked.

'Not particularly,' Subbaiah admitted. 'My student insisted it would be valuable someday. It was his way of offering *guru dakshina*. Hussain is quite renowned, though I can't quite grasp the appeal of this piece.'

'Subbaiah, just because it's beyond your comprehension doesn't render it worthless,' Ganapathy chimed in with a chuckle. 'Often, the true value of things is only recognized when they're appreciated by others.'

'Like Malathi's cooking?' Moon teased.

'Precisely! You might tire of it, but her sambar is exceptional. Let's have dinner; it's getting late, and Moon must be famished.'

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Moon relished the Andhra cuisine, pleasantly astounded by its fiery yet delectable flavor, surpassing even the famed spiciness of Corean dishes. It was his first encounter with the zest of Indian vegetarian fare.

The dinner's discourse, though lackluster for the ladies who withdrew early, captivated the gentlemen. The conversation revolved around America's civil rights movement and Martin Luther King Jr.'s Nobel Peace Prize from the prior year. They pondered over the forthcoming laureate, soon to be unveiled.

Ganapathy queried, 'Isn't it peculiar that Gandhi never received the prize?'

'I'm not taken aback,' Subbaiah retorted, 'It's a decision by those indifferent to the wider world, merely advancing Norway's diplomatic and economic agendas.'

'How long before the developing world gains recognition?' Ganapathy mused.

Subbaiah responded, 'Recognition will come when our economic might grows, compelling the West to engage with us for trade or political shifts.'

'Why such cynicism, Subbaiah?' Ganapathy chided.

'It's not cynicism but plain truth,' Subbaiah defended, 'akin to the dominance of Brahmins in India or the North's monopoly on opportunities.'

'But I'm a Brahmin, and you, as department head, influence my career,' Ganapathy pointed out.

'Don't oversimplify,' Subbaiah urged, 'Your caste is immaterial to me; you're my friend.'

'Then refrain from remarks that wound,' Ganapathy requested.

'Apologies, I was swept up in emotion,' Subbaiah conceded, 'Delhi's silence is exasperating.'

'I doubt any declaration is forthcoming,' Ganapathy speculated.

'Let's hope not,' Subbaiah agreed.

Moon, seeking to divert the tense dialogue, interjected, 'Why isn't there a Nobel Prize in Economics?'

'Economics is more philosophy than science,' Subbaiah claimed.

Ganapathy countered, 'Economics is a social science, scrutinizing production, distribution, and consumption, elucidating the behaviors and interactions within economies.'

'Yet, it lacks the empirical testing of a lab,' Subbaiah argued, 'The Nobel is reserved for fields yielding tangible outcomes.'

The discussion became heated, but at least it steered clear of the caste system in India. They could not reach a consensus and finally had to be pulled away by their respective wives, as the clock ticked away.

Strolling back to the hostel, Moon hoped that Vinay was fast asleep, he just wanted to change his attire and dash over to Andys'.

'How was the Chinese meal?' Vinay inquired upon Moon's return.

'Scrumptious. I presumed you'd be asleep,' Moon replied.

'I'm battling sleep, upset stomach from overindulging in *dal*,' Vinay confessed.

Dal, a staple in North Indian cuisine, was notorious for its rapid digestion and subsequent gaseous effects. Vinay, a fan of this dish, seemed to embody its aftereffects.

Moon pondered, 'Is *dal* more potent than *sambar*? I need to get out of here quickly.'

Vinay shared, 'I caught wind of an announcement from Indira on the radio. She's Prime Minister material; under her, India could soar to new heights.'

'Do you know the details?' Moon inquired.

'I overheard some students discussing it at the mess. I hesitated to approach them due to caste differences. I tried asking a Tamil Brahmin later, but received only a cold stare,' Vinay explained.

'What about the bottles? Were they discarded?' Moon asked.

'No, Andy and some other *chinkis* collected all the herbal remedies,' Vinay replied.

Moon felt compelled to address Vinay's language, 'You realize *chinki* is a derogatory term?'

'It's merely colloquial, used for Chinese and Northeasterners, much like *kaalia* for Africans,' Vinay dismissed.

'Is this a widespread attitude in North India?' Moon questioned.

'What are you implying?' Vinay asked.

'Never mind,' Moon deflected, 'I'll check with Andy about the Prime Minister's statement.'

Upon arrival, Moon found Andy and his friends in a tranquil slumber, intoxicated by a mix of zutho and ganja, serenading to *The Beatles*. The room was unkempt, but at least free from Vinay's lingering scent.

Moon navigated through the clutter, settling beside two friends on the floor, while another shared Andy's bed. Their serene expressions hinted at pleasant dreams.

Moon resigned to await the morning for news of the Prime Minister's announcement, which even Professor Subbaiah seemed unaware of.

He lay restless, contemplating the future until dreams enveloped his thoughts, leaving faint traces by dawn.

BONDS OF LANGUAGE

Naga felt a growing frustration. It had been nearly a week since the mysterious encounter at the library, yet he still couldn't place where he had seen Ganapathy before. Daily visits to the library and the Anna memorial with Maya yielded no sign of the old man.

Maya, on the other hand, seemed to be settling in well. She spent considerable time at the Madras Archives, where she met professors from the Madras Institute of Development Studies and Madras School of Economics. Their insights proved valuable. In the evenings, Naga introduced her to his friends in the city. Mathew and Ruby, a delightful couple, quickly became her favorites.

Despite their growing closeness over the past seven days, Naga and Maya hadn't crossed any physical boundaries. He admired her, stealing glances at her curvaceous figure, and dreamt of passionate encounters each night. But fear held him back from making the first move—his roommate's imminent return added urgency.

Maya, however, struggled with the local cuisine. Naga took her to popular restaurants, but the flavors didn't resonate. At home, his attempts at cooking exotic dishes turned into major flops. He realized she missed her home food and resolved to take her to Corea Town soon.

Today, a Monday, marked Naga's return to work after a week. He had planned to keep Maya occupied until evening. First on the agenda was the 'Dravidian Culture' conference organized by the Dravidian Institute of Technology, where Maya was a registered participant. Later, Ruby would pick her up for shopping at Spencer's Plaza. By dinner time on Mount Road, Naga hoped to join them.

The conference proved enlightening for Maya. Engaging presentations offered deep insights into various aspects of Dravidian culture. She exchanged notes with professors, although she sensed some bias against the so-called Aryans.

It was definitely a goldmine for her research, as she got a deep insight into various aspects of the Dravidian culture, and managed to meet a lot of professors to exchange notes. They were very helpful, but she suspected they were a little too biased against the so-called Aryans.

The underlying theme seemed to be that the Aryans arrived in North India somewhere from Iran and southern Russia at around 1500 BC and conquered the indigenous Dravidian people. They were ruthless, disregarded the local cultures, and began taking control over regions, pushing the local people southwards. The caste system was established during this period to subjugate the darker skinned Dravidians.

Almost all the participants agreed that the Hindu religious stories about the many wars between gods and the dark-skinned demons actually referred to Aryans and Dravidians. As far as they were concerned, it was just one aspect of cultural imperialism that justified their civil war.

In fact, a professor from Kerala pointed out that some Hindu gods were Dravidian and other gods Aryan. In particular, Shiva is a Dravidian god and not a Vedic god because he is not prominent in the Rig Veda, the oldest Vedic text. Some hold that Shaivism is a South Indian religion and the Vedic religion is North Indian. He received the loudest applause.

In the afternoon session on languages, she learned that Aryan languages like Hindi had been heavily influenced by Sanskrit, unlike the Dravidian languages. Their ways of developing words and grammar are also different.

She was surprised to know that the Dravidian family of languages comprises 27 languages spread across the entire subcontinent, while she was under the impression that there were just four. But what absolutely took her by shock was a presentation on the similarities between Dravidian and other world languages.

Professor Robert Cadwell from Harvard University hypothesized that Dravido-Corean languages are a language family that links Tamil to Corean, the similarities were first noted by French missionaries who traveled between the two regions.

'Some scholars believe Corean to be a language isolate. Others believe that the language and people from the South Pacific region are closely related to Dravida. There is also linguistic, anthropological and archeological evidence that Corean may be connected to the Austronesian languages, but I tend to believe the theory that early Tamil people migrated to the Corean peninsula,' he said.

As proof, he referred to the work by a Corean researcher, Kim Jung-nam, who founded the Corean Society of Tamil Studies and identified close to 500

cognates and about 60 phonological correspondence pairs between the languages.

'Moreover, both the languages are grammatically similar, and in both the letter 'l' is interchangeable with 'r' and words cannot begin with them.'

That is interesting. How can Dravidian languages and Corean be interrelated?

She hurriedly opened the appendix attached to his presentation and was greeted with a list of similar words. *Appā, Ammā, Eonni, Nuna, Nā, Nī, Tām, Aigu, Nāḷ*...it went on.

'Tamil and Corean have the same syntactic characteristics: the word order subject-object-verb, postpositions instead of prepositions, no relative pronouns, modifiers in front of the head noun, copula and existential as two distinct grammatical parts of speech,' Cadwell continued.

Maya decided to meet with the professor after the conference and have a lengthy chat. This was by far the most shocking news she had heard since arriving in Madras.

How come no ordinary Corean knows it? Everyone thinks it is related to Chinese, Japanese and Mongolian languages, some also believe that it is related to Turkish, but never Dravidian languages.

She lost her chance as Professor Cadwell rushed out after giving his presentation without even waiting for the customary question and answer session.

He will surely be here for the closing ceremony.

An hour later, as the valedictory speech was being wrapped up, she looked around trying to locate him again.

Not in sight.

She turned back, and sure enough, he was there in the back row engrossed in conversation. She jumped out of her seat and approached him, not wanting to lose him again, when a sharp familiar voice caught her ear.

'Robert, the Aryans and Dravidians are part of the same culture, dividing them and placing them at odds with each other is just a mind game,' the voice thundered.

Professor Ganapathy! When did he come here?

'Excuse me sir. It's me Maya,' she said, forgetting the Harvard professor in her excitement.

'Young lady, can't you see I am busy?' Ganapathy curtly replied, turning back to his neighbor. 'I am meeting my dear friend after 10 years.'

Embarrassed, she stood silently on the side, and waited for him to finish the conversation.

'Nineteenth century was the era of Europeans imperialism. Europeans thinkers of that time were dominated by a racial theory of man, interpreted primarily in terms of skin color,' he continued. 'The British promoted the theory of a light-skinned Aryan race ruling a dark Dravidian race.'

'I beg to differ Ganapathy, Sanskrit and North Indian languages are relatives of the European languages, but the Dravidian languages are entirely different.'

'Who said so? Dravidian languages have so many Sanskrit words. The European scholars always felt that the original speakers of any root Indo-European language must have been white. The British promoted religious, ethnic and cultural divisions among their colonies to keep us under control, unfortunately some of these policies were subsumed by the so-called intellectuals.'

'So you mean to say that the European scholars invented the concept of Aryan and Dravidian races?'

'Exactly, the difference between them is not a racial division, the idea is the product of an unscientific and culturally biased thinking, which only looked at race through the narrow prism of color. Scientifically, the only three primary races are Caucasian, Mangolian and Negroid.'

'I hope what you say is backed up by evidence, because all my research suggests otherwise.'

'I am sure there will be evidence soon. I believe your university is undertaking a project to analyze 500,000 genetic markers across the genomes of 132 individuals from 25 diverse groups from 13 states.'

'That is true, my colleague is collaborating with MIT and some Dravidian organizations, once the results come out we will know whether you are right. I know it is difficult to argue with you Ganapathy, but as always it has been a pleasure. I have to rush for a dinner meeting.'

'So long Robert. Hope to see you again soon. Let me know the results of the project once they are analyzed.'

'Sure will. One of my students will contact you, maybe we will invite you to Harvard for a lecture.'

'So young lady, do I know you?' Ganapathy said, turning towards Maya.

'Sir, it is me. I met you on Marina Beach and the library?'

'Oh yes, how could I forget such a beautiful face, I am sorry I am getting old. Why don't you meet me at the library tomorrow, I will get you my article.'

'I have already read it, and have a few doubts that I wanted to discuss.'

'OK, 3'O clock at the library... and don't come with that rude friend of yours from *The Hindu*.'

'Thank you, sir,' Maya responded, eager to share the news with Naga.

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Maya emerged from the conference hall, her thoughts swirling with new revelations. She noticed Ruby, engrossed in her laptop, seated comfortably on a nearby sofa. Maya's phone displayed several missed calls; she attempted to reach Naga with her exciting news, but to no avail.

'Must be tied up in a meeting,' she mused.

Approaching Ruby, Maya apologized for missing the calls, only to learn that Ruby had been preoccupied with a rescue operation for an injured puppy. Ruby was a dedicated volunteer at Blue Cross, a non-governmental organization dedicated to preventing cruelty towards animals.

Her boss, Captain Sundaram had started the organization a few years ago, and mostly relied on volunteers to help him out. With the help of his wife and children he ran the organization on meager resources. A staunch crusader against cruelty to animals, the former pilot managed to attract many educated young women like Ruby to spread awareness on animal welfare.

'It is so sad how some people treat animals,' Maya said.

'Yes, it is. The puppy that we rescued had been badly beaten and left to die. I hope he survives. We have evidence of the culprit on close circuit camera, the cops will be dealing with him soon.'

'What will happen?'

'He will get a two-year prison term.'

'Amazing. No one cares for animals in my country.'

'We have very stringent rules for animal abusers. Our second President NTR loved animals and introduced some very tough laws,' Ruby said closing her laptop.

'In my country, there are no stray or abandoned dogs. If one is found on the roads, it is immediately taken home.'

'That is good, but you said no one cares.'

'Yes, they end up on the dining table.'

'Oh my God!'

'Dog soup is a traditional food in Corea for centuries. We call it *bosingtan*.'

'How can people eat dogs?'

'Not the pets, but dogs specially bred for their meat, although abandoned or lost pets are never spared. Actually, many of the younger generation is against dog meat, but the older generation doesn't care. We are still a poor country and the income inequality is high, so free meat is always welcome.'

'Have you ever tasted dog meat?'

'I did as a child, but not anymore. I cannot bear the thought as I have two Schnauzers at home. Coreans and Chinese believe that *bosintang* has medicinal properties and also increases stamina. Dog meat keeps one's body cool during the summer.'

'I know it is rude to comment on other cultures, but don't you think it should be banned?'

'I understand your feelings, especially since you work for animal welfare, but older Coreans don't differentiate between dogs, cows or pigs. We cannot ban dog meat without banning other meat. In any case, this concept of keeping pets for entertainment is a Western concept, the Asian society has always kept animals for their food.'

'Not any longer, but you are right, we tend to get upset with the dog eating cultures without realizing that cows, pigs and goats are also thinking animals. Why not ban animal killing altogether?'

'Are you a vegetarian?'

'No, I am not.'

'Now isn't that a paradox? Many people who fight for animal rights are non-vegetarians. They do not mind eating animals for their own food. I think each individual should be free to decide what she wants to eat. The government has no role to play, and certainly the Western society should not tell us which meat can be eaten and which not.'

'You are right, the people who object to dog meat mostly come from countries where beef and pork are a standard diet. I don't mind vegetarians protesting against killing animals for food, but non-vegetarians complaining about dog meat are just hypocrites.'

'You know Ruby, there is an argument that whales should not be killed because of their high intelligence, so the Western world wants to ban whale hunting, without considering that it has been food for Northern European and the East Asian countries for generations. If that is the case, pigs also possess high intelligence, but they are routinely butchered and eaten. Why don't they demand a ban on eating pork?'

'You may be right, but the Western lobby is more powerful, that is how they got whale hunting banned in 1986. Moreover, the issue is not as simple as you mentioned. Most whale species are getting extinct.'

'Dogs are not extinct. I am sure they will succeed in imposing a global ban on dog meat, while continuing with beef and pork.'

'Maya, I know it is an emotional issue. By the way, do you know that beef is banned in Hindustan because Hindu's worship the cow, but pork is allowed although Muslims consider it dirty.'

'I heard there are a lot of Muslims and Christians in Hindustan, don't they protest?'

'They did, but it is a Hindu nation, and no one cares for the minorities, especially Muslims, because the greatest enemy is Pakistan. Not so in Dravida, which is secular.'

'So although you have majority Hindu's, you can eat beef here?'

'Sure. We allow all types of meat, but their killing is heavily regulated. No one eats dogs or snakes, so they are not included in the laws.'

'What exactly is the proportion of minorities in Dravida and Hindustan?'

'Dravida has a population of 223 million, of which the Hindu population is roughly 83 percent, Muslim's 11 percent and Christian's 6 percent.'

'What about Hindustan?'

'Hindustan has almost four times our population, around 805 million. Hindus are 80 percent, Muslim's 14 percent and Christian's 2 percent. They also have other minor religions like Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists.'

'So, you mean to say that Hindustan has a greater number of Muslims and Christians in absolute terms?'

'Yes, non-Hindus in Hindustan are around 165 million, which is almost equal to our total Hindu population.'

'Yet they banned beef?'

'That is the difference between a secular democracy and a dictatorship. By the way, want to taste beef curry tonight?'

'Sure, Naga never told me. I always thought it was banned here because of the Hindus.'

'I have an idea, why don't we go to a good beef restaurant run by a Keralite.'

'From your province?'

'Kerala is known for its beef dishes, we call it *nadan* curry, and you will love it. First let's take a taxi and do some shopping at Spencers'. We can wait for Naga, and Mathew said he would join us.'

'Sounds like a good idea to me.'

The mobile suddenly buzzed in her handbag.

'Sorry, I couldn't take your calls. I was in the library. Where are you now?' Naga said.

'At the conference, on the way to Spencers Plaza. I have some good news for you. Guess who I met?'

'Ruby?'

'Hey don't joke, you know she was supposed to pick me up and is here now. Professor Ganapathy!'

'So the old man did not die?'

'Of course not, I am meeting him again tomorrow.'

'I will be there soon, we can discuss it later, don't want to get fined for talking while driving.'

'Just one more thing. Did you know that Coreans originally came from Dravida?'

'Impossible, we are a completely different race.'

'Wait till you hear what I just heard. Don't be late.'

'I too have some interesting news to share.'

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Maya reclined on the sofa, her taste buds still dancing from the flavors of the beef curry. 'I never imagined beef curry could be so delicious,' she mused, reflecting on the evening with Ruby and Mathew.

Naga nodded, 'Kerala has a knack for curries. It's quite different from the Western steaks, isn't it?'

'True. In Corea, we're fond of grilling marinated meat, like *Bulgogi*. It's a hit with foreigners,' Maya shared.

Naga chuckled, 'By foreigners, you mean Westerners, right? Here, we pair everything with curry and rice. It's a culinary tradition that speaks to our distinct heritage.'

'I explained to you at the restaurant, it has nothing to do with the color of our skin or looks. The evolution of our languages clearly shows that there was a mixing of blood sometime in the past.'

'It is a theory that was abandoned years ago.'

'I heard they are doing some genome project at Harvard. Professor Ganapathy's friend will send him the results, and then you can have the proof, I somehow believe it.'

'Let's wait for the results then.'

'Fine. Hey, what about that interesting news that you wanted to share. Why couldn't you tell it in front of Ruby and Mathew?'

'I had my reasons. Want a drink? I feel like a scotch.'

'I could do with some white wine.'

'As you wish', Naga said moving towards his small bar. A few minutes later, he was back with the drinks trolley.

He poured her drink and headed towards the bookshelves next to the television. From a hidden compartment near the bottom of the one on the right, Maya watched as he pulled out a small package wrapped in a plastic sheet. Without saying a word, he sat next to her and carefully started unwrapping it.

'What is that?' she asked, taking a sip from her wine glass.

'My father's memories,' his eyes turned misty.

He separated the contents of the package- a small handwritten diary, a wristwatch, newspaper clippings and an old photograph.

Raising the old photo in his hand, he pushed it closer to her eyes. 'Do you notice anything?'

Three young men standing below a huge painting hanging on the wall, the painting is ugly and makes no sense.

'Is that your father in the middle? He looked a lot like you when he was young.'

'Yes, you are right, my mother always says that I remind her of him. In fact, she was the one who took this photograph.'

'Where is she now?'

'In Hyderabad, my hometown. She doesn't want to stay here with me as she blames Madras for my father's disappearance. She will only miss him more.'

'We should visit Hyderabad someday.'

'That is the plan next week. I have fixed some interviews for a story about the IT industry. Now take a closer look at the photograph, can you recognize anyone else?'

She squinted her eyes, stared at the photograph and gasped.

'Isn't that Professor Ganapathy? He looks so young.'

'Exactly. I cannot make out the other guy on his left. The face is a bit fuzzy.'

'That's because the photo is worn out, it may be another professor.'

'Could be, but he is quite short with light skin. I think he is Ganapathy's son.'

'So, he was lying, he knew your father.'

'That's what I told you. His face seemed very familiar. I saw an old photograph of his during the civil war in my newspaper archives, that's when it hit me.'

'If he was your father's friend, maybe your mother will know. Why don't you talk to her?'

'I already did, but she doesn't remember anyone by that name. She is 72 years old, and her memory has started slipping.'

'Then you have to show her the photograph once again. She will surely remember the face.'

'I could easily scan it and send her an email, but her computer has conked out, too many viruses, damn Microsoft. Unless I personally go there and check, she won't call the service center.'

'So, what will you do?'

'Nothing, we have to wait till we go to Hyderabad. In the meantime, you should try getting the information out of Ganapathy. There must be a reason he is behaving this way.'

'Maybe he fell out with your father. At the conference, he kept saying that Arayans and Dravidians are the same race. If that was so, then the whole idea of a different nation based on race would not be justified. Wasn't that the whole basis for the civil war which our father fought for?'

'It was, we are different races, and there is no doubt about that. He is just saying it because he is a leftist Iyer.'

'What do you mean?'

'Tamil Brahmins can be broadly classified as Iyers and Iyengars, although there are more sub-divisions within these categories. Iyers worship Shiva while Iyengars worship Vishnu, two popular gods in Hindu mythology.'

'What has that got to do with race?'

'Patience. The two groups of Brahmins believe they were originally Indo-Aryans who came down to the south thousands of years ago and settled. For this reason, many of their rituals and legends are similar to North Indians, which is why they have an air of superiority.'

'Why is Professor Ganapathy against this theory? He is a Brahmin.'

'That is because he is a leftist. There is a section of our society that believes we are the same race and should therefore be united into one country again. Our present President belongs to this group, and they are trying to reconcile with Hindustan.'

'Anyway, he had the same opinion 20 years ago in his article that I collected at the library.'

'What does he say?'

'You won't like it; he concludes that capitalist societies like Dravida will ultimately collapse because they were built on a false sense of identity. He analyzed the economic indicators of England, Dravida and Canada and found similarities.'

'What kind of similarities?'

'People's class has a major impact on their opportunities; and not everyone is free to pursue their goals. People with the most opportunities are usually those who have the most capital. Equal opportunity for everyone is just a myth.'

'Typical communist argument. Our system protects individual's rights and liberties and everyone has an equal opportunity to reach their full potential. In socialist countries only the powerful have opportunities,' Naga said.

'He also pointed out that consumers in capitalist countries think they have a choice, but in reality, they do not. The companies decide what will be produced and there is also larger income inequality.'

'Wrong again. Companies will produce goods only if there is a demand for them. I can also assure you that income inequality is greater in the communist countries.'

'His study has compared the economic indicators and found otherwise. He concludes that capitalist countries will have higher economic growth in the first two decades of independence, which will be followed by a slowdown. Canada and England, both strong capitalist countries, slowed down after two decades of independence.'

'That hasn't happened in Dravida.'

'You are right, but I do not think he will change his opinion. I intend to find that out tomorrow.'

'What time do you meet him?'

'Around three in the library, he specifically told me not to bring you along.'

'I guess he is pissed that I saw through his lies. Maybe he recognized me, you said I look just like my father in the photograph. I will drop you and go back to work.'

'What about the morning agenda?'

'I have fixed up some meetings with a few Hindustan defectors. We will go together.'

'You mean they emigrated from Hindustan and are settled here?'

'That's right. Not immigrated, escaped. Ordinary citizens are not allowed a passport. Only party officials and a few businessmen can leave the country.'

'You are joking, right?'

'You wish. The usual strategy is to cross the border into Nepal, Tibet, Bangladesh or Burma before fleeing to a third country like Thailand. All the four countries are close allies of Delhi and refuse to grant them refugee status. If they are caught they are deported back to Hindustan where they face public execution or detention in political prisons in the Thar Desert.'

'What about Pakistan?'

'No one dare go to Pakistan. There is a bitter war over Kashmir, and all Hindustani's are executed on the spot.'

'Why does Thailand offer them refugee status?'

'It has close historic relations with Dravida, since many of our ancient kingdoms had expanded to Southeast Asia. If the defectors manage to flee to Thailand they are officially classified as illegal immigrants, and the government deports them to my country after they serve their prison sentences.'

'What happens after they come here?'

'They are interrogated by our intelligence agency to ensure that they are genuine and not spies, and then sent to a resettlement center on the outskirts of Madras. They are thoroughly debriefed and given training to adjust to life here.'

'How do they manage to live without money?'

'The government initially helps them.'

'Does Hindustan have the same facilities for Dravidian defectors?'

'Who would want to defect to Hindustan? The government cannot even feed its own people. Do you know that 3 million people died last year because of famine, and they demanded food aid from us?'

'I heard there are a few defectors living there...'

'All of them were kidnapped by spies here, like my father. It is just a propaganda tool used by them to tell the world that Dravidians want to defect. No one knows what those so-called defectors are doing now. Probably in a prison.'

'My Prime Minister visited Delhi last year, and they showed it on television. The country looked very developed with modern buildings and clean roads.'

'It is the showcase capital, just to fool the outside world that they are developed. If you go beyond Delhi, you will be shocked.'

'I hope my visa comes through. I can see for myself; how much is hype and how much reality. I planned to go to Delhi after returning back to Corea.'

'You mentioned it before. I am sure you will not be able to see reality, because I heard no foreigner is allowed to go anywhere unaccompanied. You will always be followed by two minders, who will control what you see and whom you talk to.'

'How do you know?'

'Everyone knows that. A lot of visitors have written their accounts on their blogs with secret photos and videos of people in other towns. The defectors you meet tomorrow may convince you.'

'OK then, I guess it is time to call it a day. The wine has gone to my head.'

'So has the scotch, I will work for some time, before turning in, have to complete an article. Goodnight.'

Maya was slightly tipsy as she closed the door to her room and stripped before heading to the bathroom. She had a very productive day, and learned quite a lot.

She admired her firm breasts and naked body in the mirror, feeling a strange excitement. She was growing sexually attracted towards Naga.

Having forced him to undergo a complete makeover, complete with a new wardrobe and a decent haircut, his sharp features now stood out. He certainly seemed more confident than a week ago, but remained a perfect gentleman and did not make any inappropriate moves. All his flirting emails were just bravado.

I look sexy and definitely younger. I am sure he is attracted and just waiting for the right moment. Let us see...should I try something tonight? No. Both of us are drunk. This has to be done when we are completely sober.

Feeling refreshed after a warm shower, she switched off the lights and quietly opened her door just a bit, to check on Naga.

He was sitting on his study table, pounding furiously on his computer, with an empty bottle of scotch to his side.

She immediately closed the door and snuggled into her bed. As she tossed and turned, her mind kept wandering from Naga to Professor Ganapathy, and finally to her 3-year-old son back home, before a deep sleep overtook her.

THE FIRST SHOUT

Subbaiah, groggy from sleep, retrieved The Hindu from his doorstep and settled into his chair. The morning was just beginning to stir, with the sun peeking through clouds and birdsong filling the air. Inside, the radio played Sri Venkateswara Suprabhatam, signaling the start of the day as Malathi finished her prayers. Subbaiah, craving his morning tea, sighed with impatience.

He unfolded the newspaper, and the headlines struck him like a bolt of lightning:

Hindi Proclaimed the National Language
PM Indira Announces Constitutional Amendments

With his heart in his mouth, Subbaiah read the full article.

His pulse quickened as he read on. The Official Languages Act was to be abolished; Hindi would soon be the sole official language. Non-Hindi speaking states were to adopt a bilingual approach, mandating Hindi alongside the regional tongue. Conversely, Hindi-speaking regions were exempt from such requirements. The Civil Services exams would be in Hindi only, pressuring all to become proficient in the language.

The Prime Minister's speech, brief and in Hindi, was a clear provocation. Subbaiah skimmed the translated excerpts, his anger mounting with each word about the imposition of Hindi and the dismissal of English as a colonial relic.

A nation's strength ultimately consists in what it can do on its own, and not in what it can borrow from others...

For over a decade our brothers from Madras have been protesting the majority decision to make Hindi the sole official language. Before taking a decision, I have consulted with all political parties across the nation...

I have often said that I do not want to impose Hindi on anyone. Yet, in my concern for the future of our country, how can I ignore the fact that

since the beginning of the British rule, English has been used to dominate and discriminate against us in social customs and in laws...

This is unquestioningly accepted and acquiesced in by all but a minuscule minority from Madras. By allowing English to be an associate language, we are depriving ourselves of a fuller emancipation and growth. We are merely exchanging one kind of bondage for another...

Whether the opponents of Hindi like it or not, they cannot escape their responsibility nor should they be denied its benefits...

We want to walk together and in step with all others, but some people are still hesitating. You cannot shake hands with a clenched fist...'

'Nonsense,' he shouted, crumpling the newspaper and flinging it on the ground.

'What happened?' Malathi asked, coming out with a cup of tea.

'Exactly what we feared,' he said pointing towards the crumpled newspaper.

She picked it up, glanced at the headlines and gave it back. It was easier to ask him for the details, she had not yet mastered the English language and was more comfortable in Telugu.

'So, what do your leaders say?'

'The reporter tried to get in touch with Anna and Karunanidhi, but they are away in Kerala, the others in party office refused to speak.'

'What do you think will happen now?'

'I don't know. She made the announcement late at night yesterday without any warning. My radio was switched off because of our dinner party.'

'Subbaiah, Subbaiah, you heard the news? You have a phone call,' it was Ganapathy, shouting from the neighboring patio.

'Thanks, da. I will be right over, let me just put on my shirt,' he shouted back.

A few minutes later, he was on the phone talking with Senthil.

'What is your party going to do now?' Ganapathy asked, as Subbaiah put down the receiver.

'We have an urgent meeting at 8.30 in the party headquarters. Anna and Karunanidhi will be addressing us, they travelled overnight by car from Trivandrum and have reached Madras.'

'You be careful, thalaivar. Think well before you decide anything.'

''Don't worry. Indira deserves a fitting reply.'

'So, I assume there will be no work again.'

'Damn right. You can safely stay indoors again till we fight for our rights.'

'Hey, no need to be rude, don't take your anger out on me.'

'I am sorry, da. You know how stressed out I am.'

•••

Moon realized something was wrong when he saw Vinay packing his bags.

'Again?' he asked.

'This time for good. Indira has finally made Hindi our national language,' Vinay said, looking up.

'So, what did she announce?'

'Read the newspaper on the table, I stole it from the mess.'

Going through the contents, Moon realized that the situation was very grim.

'When is your train?'

'I plan to go directly to the station and catch the first train going north. There will be a lot of violence and they may target North Indians.'

'What do you think I should do?'

'They won't hurt foreigners, maybe you should ask for the first flight out of here.'

'I will, if our university office is open. I don't think there will be any classes today.'

'Not just today, for a long time, my friend,' Vinay said, letting out a silent fart.

'I will wake up Andy and the guys, they have to know this,' Moon turned around and walked out with the newspaper in hand, just as the deadly vapors grazed his neck.

As he walked down the corridor, he saw many students leaving with their bags. The exodus was not just restricted to North Indian students, but many from the south as well. They were all speaking in high-pitched voices and rushing away, almost as if they had seen a ghost.

Andy and his friends were still fast asleep, doors open. He banged on the study table repeatedly and shook them roughly.

'Wake up guys. Wake up. Emergency.'

One by one they arose from their slumber.

'What's up man?' Andy asked rubbing his eyes.

'The announcement has been made; Hindi is the national language.'

'What?' they all shouted in unison.

Moon thrust the newspaper towards them, as they read the newspaper article.

'That's unfair...it says that all the civil service exams will be in Hindi. What about us? How will students from Nagaland, Assam andManipurget jobs?' Andy said.

'Isn't that the question Madras students were asking a few months ago? Why didn't you guys join the agitation then?' Moon asked.

'None of us bothered, we never expected the government to make the announcement.'

'It has now. What is your plan?'

'I guess we have to learn Hindi.'

'Couldn't you protest?'

'They won't listen to us. None of the powerful Congress leaders are from Northeast. There are many from Madras.'

'As part of the country, shouldn't you guys demand equal rights?'

'Look, Northeast is far away from Delhi, we have always been treated as outsiders, which is why we came here to study in Madras. At least no one passes snide remarks and bullies us here.'

'So, you mean to say that you guys will learn Hindi without any protest.'

'If we have to survive, there is no option. I am sure there will be a quota of government jobs for us.'

'I heard there will be protests here again, maybe if there are protests in your States too, the government may back down.'

'That is not going to happen, we have to learn Hindi, it is after all the majority.'

'You are speaking just like Vinay; he has packed his bags and is going back home.'

'I think we too should do that, and stay away till things cool down.'

Moon just could not understand the passive approach of Andy and his other friends. They accepted whatever was dictated to them, even if it was unfair.

'At least the Madras students have balls,' he thought as he headed back to his room.

More students were streaming out with their luggage. At this rate the hostel would soon be empty.

What about the five other foreign exchange students? They are all in the same position as I am.

As far as he recalled there were students from Somalia, Ceylone, Iran, Japan and China. He was not aware of any other foreigner on campus.

He had casual acquaintance with Abdi from Somalia, Jegan from Ceylone and Reza from Iran, but had completely ignored the other two students, and was not bothered about their whereabouts.

Abdi was just coming back from the common bathroom, towel wrapped around his waist.

'Hey Abdi.'

'Hey man, what's going on? Haven't seen you around lately.'

'Did you hear what's happening?'

'That Hindi shit? Yes, man, heard it. Makes no difference to me, my flight is tonight.'

'Where are you going?'

'You didn't know? My admission to Yale came through.'

'Congrats. Do you know where Jegan and Raza are?'

'Jegan went home last week when there were protests. He hasn't returned. Reza should be around.'

'Thanks man. All the best.'

Have to find Reza. Wonder what his plans are.

'Hi Choi,' a voice called out.

He turned around; it was that Chinese student accompanied by the Japanese guy.

'Hi, how are you?'

'You look worried.'

'Yeah, the hostel may shut down and everyone is leaving.'

'We know, that's why we sought a transfer to Delhi University last week. I always knew there would be trouble, especially after hearing about the riots in January.'

'So, you are going to Delhi?'

'Yes. Our professor advised us and gave a recommendation. He said there might not be any classes this year.'

'Maybe I should ask Professor Subbaiah.'

'South Indian? He will say there will be no problem. Our professor is from North India, even he is leaving for Delhi.'

'No harm in asking. Thanks guys.'

'We could have hung out together, you always ignored us,' the Japanese student spoke.

Moon walked away without replying.

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Subbaiah was tense. The meeting had not gone as smoothly as expected. Anna and Karunanidhi had a heated argument on the future course of action.

Anna wanted to stage peaceful protests across all the South Indian states. After talks with the other top opposition leaders in other states, he was confident that a united front would weaken Indira's resolve. Karunanidhi on the other hand was more agitated and wanted a violent rebuttal.

Finally, a compromise was reached. If a week of peaceful protests did not work then they would advise the cadres to use strong-arm tactics against the government machinery. Essential services were not to be disrupted, as the public would be their main source of strength.

Subbaiah was once again asked to organize the students for a demonstration in front of Fort St. George, culminating with a march to Marina Beach, where Anna and the other leaders would address them at noon. It was already nine and he had to start preparations soon.

Subbaiah got some frowns when he pointed out that it would be impossible to gather the students at such a short notice. He requested for the 'MGR card' once again and promised the largest possible crowd, for a public meeting at 6 pm. His plan was that at this meeting, Anna could announce the demonstration schedule for the next day. Not just students, the entire city would support it.

After being put to a vote, they accepted his suggestion and asked Senthil to help him out.

The morning was spent meeting student representatives from colleges across the city, while Senthil made arrangements with MGR's manager. Confident that a good crowd would show up in the evening, he returned home for lunch.

He knocked on the door, and was surprised to find Moon opening it, a book in hand.

'Hello, Moon, did Malathi invite you for lunch?'

'No sir, I came unannounced to meet you, I need some advice.'

'It is about the anti-Hindi demonstrations, right?' he asked, glancing at Malathi who had just come out of the kitchen.

'Yes sir, everyone in the hostel is going back home. Even the other foreign students have made alternate arrangements. I don't know what to do.'

'Don't worry, we will think of something. I hate talking on an empty stomach. Malathi is lunch ready?'

'Yes, it is. I made extra rice for Moon. He hasn't even had breakfast, and was searching for you all morning on campus.'

'Sir, I didn't want to disturb, but I knew you always came home for lunch.

'No problem, I have been busy all day in meetings, more about it later, let me wash first.'

Moon put down the book he was reading, and followed Malathi into the kitchen. Despite her protests, he insisted on helping her lay the table, and by the time Subbaiah returned, they were ready to go.

'What happened at your meeting?' Malathi inquired.

'It did not go very well. Anna and Karunanidhi have different ideas. Anyway, we will have a huge meeting on Marina Beach at six where they will announce the future course.'

'I don't want to come; I hate these political meetings.'

'As you wish, you can listen to songs on the radio. Moon you should come; it will be a good experience for you.'

'Of course, sir,' he reluctantly replied, remembering the earlier boring meeting on Marina.

'You were saying all the foreign students have also left?'

'Not all, most of them. Some have got a transfer to Delhi University and one to Yale.'

'Oh, I see. It is too late for you to transfer now; the deadline was last week one month after classes begin. Why didn't you tell me before?'

'I did sir, you said there would be no problems here.'

'Well, the situation has changed now, be prepared for the worst.'

'What do you mean?' Malathi intervened.

'This time everyone in South India is going to protest. All the other parties in Andhra, Mysore and Kerala are supporting us.'

'So there will be violence everywhere?'

'No, not this time, we will have peaceful protests for one week and check the response.'

'What if there is no response?'

'There will be. Seeing us, other states may also join.'

'What if they don't?'

'Malathi, please relax, we have it all worked out. Anna has been in politics for decades; he knows how to push the buttons.'

'I have a bad feeling about this. I told you to take that job in Andhra University.'

'Please stop this negativity. Just like your mother,' Subbaiah raised his voice, shutting her up.

'Sir, what do I do if the hostel shuts down?' Moon asked, diverting the heat.

'Tolerate life if it drags you downhill. Whatever happens, happens for the good. You can stay here, as I mentioned earlier,' he said looking at his wife for approval. She was still upset. 'Remember, you will get only Malathi's cooking, you still have time to escape.'

This time she responded with a grin. 'He loves my cooking, don't you, Moon?'

'Yes, Maam. It is different from Corean food, but much better than all the restaurant food.'

'That settles it then, you are staying here.'

'What if the agitation drags on for weeks?'

'In that case I can lend you some money and buy a flight ticket. You can return it after you are safely home.'

'Thank you, sir, I feel much better now, you and ma'am are very kind.'

'Hey, don't mention it, it is our duty, you are like a son to us.'

'Moon, you never mentioned what your parents do,' Malathi asked.

'My parents passed away during the April Revolution and I was raised by my uncle who owns a restaurant in Seoul.

'April revolution?' Subbaiah asked.

'I am sure you know of our first President Synghman Rhee?'

'I do, he was the first elected President of south in 1948 and was once again appointed President after the war unified your country.'

'We had a Presidential form of government like America and he was very autocratic and corrupt. He declared martial law and jailed many members of parliament to push through Constitutional amendments to get reelected. He kept rigging elections and won for four terms in a row, but the students were against it and there were violent protests.'

'Just like our anti-Hindi protests.'

'I was not here in January sir, so I do not know, but the agitation in 1960 is known as the April Revolution. It was violently repressed.'

'Your parents could not have been students?'

'No, they were not, both my parents were not educated. They had a small provision store in Masan, close to Pusan city.'

'Pusan...isn't it the same city where President Rhee ran away when forces from the north invaded during the war?'

'Yes sir. Masan is around 35 miles from there. The spark for the April Revolution was ignited in my hometown. On March 15, there were violent student demonstrations and the police started shooting at students. After nearly a month, a body was found on the beach, the authorities claimed that the death was due to drowning, but some protesters forced their way into the hospital and found that the school kid was badly injured with a grenade. When newspapers published the photo, it shocked people.'

'Naturally.'

'More than 40,000 residents, including my parents staged huge protests and clashed with police, who opened fire killing many.'

'What a sad story, I am sorry' Malathi said.

'I am actually proud of my parents. After their death in the demonstration, Rhee had to resign and we had true democracy.'

'It is now a parliamentary democracy like India, right?'

'We call it the second republic. Rhee had made it a Presidential system to remain in power, but the system is not fit for a country like ours. We need a parliamentary democracy, where no one has absolute power.'

'That is not entirely true. Even in a parliamentary system there are ways to get absolute power. Look at Indira, she has absolute power in India, moreover the US is a Presidential system, and there are always checks and balances,' Subbaiah said.

'Sir, are you against a parliamentary system? It has worked very well in the United Kingdom.'

'All systems have their merits and demerits, but I feel a Presidential system is better. In India and Corea, there is a fusion of powers between the executive and the legislative branches, but its success will depend largely on reforms in the political and electoral systems. Otherwise, we are in danger of having a very corrupt government and policy paralysis.'

'Isn't a Presidential system more appropriate for homogenous countries like USA and not India where you have so any different cultures and languages?' Moon asked.

'Good point. Corea is homogenous, and should have remained a Presidential system as it would have benefited your future growth. I am surprised that although America helped you in the war, your country chose a parliamentary system.'

'Sir, as a result of the war, freedom returned, and with it there was also an increase in political activity, driven by leftist and student groups who were instrumental in overthrowing Rhee. So we are now trying to distance ourselves from America and follow the middle path. In the long run it will help us prosper.'

'You know Keynes said that in the long run we are all dead.'

'True, but our children will benefit.'

'You plan to marry soon?'

'My girlfriend is in Corea and we plan to get married after I return from India.'

'Good. Maybe we will visit you someday. Malathi has never gone abroad, and I have always been interested in East Asia.'

'You are welcome, sir.'

'Well, now that lunch is over, I have to rush to the party office once again. A lot of arrangements have to be made. Why don't you go back to your hostel and take some rest? It will be a long night of activity.'

'I will be there sir, but hope you will have time to translate what is being said.

'Do not worry. I will be somewhere near the stage.'

•••

The sun was still beating down on the sand, when Moon arrived at Marina Beach.

A huge crowd had gathered at the same place where he had attended the first meeting. This time the crowd was four times larger and included not just students but people from all walks of life. Many of them appeared to have travelled long distances, as he saw quite a few *lorries* ferrying people to the venue. Many of them looked like poor peasants from the hinterland.

A huge stage had been setup and the music blaring out of the loudspeakers was keeping everyone entertained. A couple of makeshift stalls had also been setup to provide drinking water and free food to all participants.

Traffic on the entire stretch of road along had come to a standstill as the crowd swelled and spilled over. The whole atmosphere was very festive with people shouting slogans and singing songs.

Moon had never seen such a big crowd in one place before. His parents had not taken him along for the April Revolution, and he had never participated in a protest movement before. If he had, he would have been prepared for what was likely to take place soon.

Thousands of policemen were keeping an eager watch on the crowd. They were fully armed with rifles and bamboo batons, standing in a combative position behind the stage. The crowd, however, seemed to ignore them. They were having the time of their life, waiting for their leaders to come and address them. Moreover, they had been told that Anna had given strict instructions to keep the meeting peaceful.

Professor Subbaiah said it would be a peaceful meeting. Why are there so many armed cops here?

It was nearing six, and the leaders had not yet arrived. Moon peered closely at the crowd near the stage but was still unable to locate Professor Subbaiah.

He thought it best to go and stand near the stage so that he would have a better chance of bumping into him.

However, it was impossible to move an inch. The crowd was tightly packed and there was quite a distance to cover. No one was willing to give way, as everyone wanted to be closer to the stage.

Exasperated, he just stood staring at the stage, trying hard not to breathe, since a powerful stench was hanging in the air, and it got worse as people raised their hands to shout slogans. Covering his nose with his hand, he tried to move a little further away, but was trapped between bodies of all sizes and shapes. There was no escape.

Instinctively, he put his palm on the back pocket of the trouser to feel his wallet, but had to suddenly jerk it away in pain.

'*Aigoo*,' he screamed.

He saw blood oozing out from a sharp cut on his index finger, and turned around to see a dark young man squeezing out through the crowd in a hurry.

Moon checked for his wallet again. It was missing. He had been warned of pickpockets in crowded places, but never imagined that he would fall victim. Luckily, he had very little money on him, the only loss was his University Identity Card.

It can be easily replaced.

Sweating profusely, he stood still hoping for the event to start soon. Anna and the others had not yet arrived and Professor Subbaiah was nowhere to be seen.

He suddenly heard a huge roar, as he noticed a police officer walk onto the stage and make an announcement.

The crowd turned restive and many of them started shouting slogans, the cops behind the stage were now slowly inching forward. The officer kept shouting into the microphone. He appeared to be giving orders, and his tone seemed unusually harsh.

The crowd was now getting agitated, many fists went up and people started angrily shouting slogans. Moon was slowly getting dragged along with the crowd, closer to the stage.

He watched in horror as the entire line of cops behind the stage now was marching in front, rifles lifted shoulder high.

They are going to shoot!

He tried escaping backwards, but the crowd would not allow it. Suddenly, he saw a couple of stones being hurled at the cops, the officer screamed something into the microphone, even as Moon tripped and fell, headfirst.

Luckily for him, the sand cushioned the fall. He protected his head with his hands and tried to lie still, but it was impossible, as he felt a few kicks at irregular intervals with more people stumbling on top. Gathering all his strength, he tried to get up again. It was futile. Piles of bodies just kept tripping around.

He could now smell pungent smoke and heard a stream of gunshots. His eyes were burning, and the smell nauseated him. Now the crowd was running back, as more people fell.

Moon was now lying underneath a pile of breathing bodies, all trying hard to get up and run away as fast as possible. He felt suffocated and the hot sand underneath him made it even more unbearable. He gasped for breath, as tears streamed down his cheeks. His energy started draining as he gasped for fresh air.

Within seconds he blacked out, as Professor Subbaiah's voice echoed in his ears:

Whatever happens, happens for the good.

The Defectors Resettlement Colony loomed before them—a fortress guarded by armed sentinels, concrete walls topped with barbed wire, and surveillance cameras. Maya had dozed off during the drive, but Naga's nudge brought her back to reality.

'Maya, wake up. We have almost reached.'

'How long was I asleep?' she asked rubbing her eyes.

'For around 30 minutes, your eyes closed as soon as we hit the expressway. There it is,' Naga said pointing ahead.

The place seemed like a fortress, with heavily armed guards, high concrete walls topped by barbed wire and close circuit cameras.

Naga parked his car at the entrance and told Moon to wait in the car. He walked to the main gate and greeted the security guard. He was escorted to the visitor's section, where he had to register their names, provide identification proof and fill up a form.

Clutching two visitor tags, he came back to the car and handed one to Maya.

'Hang this around your neck. Don't lose it, or we will get into trouble.'

He hopped into the car and this time drove right through the open gates. It was just the beginning. They had to pass through two other checkpoints, and then travel for nearly a kilometer on a deserted road sprinkled with soldiers, before they finally reached a huge brick building.

More formalities. They had to register once again and wait in the lobby. Shortly after, a middle-aged balding man carrying a file walked towards them.

'Mr. Nagarjuna?'

'Yes,' Naga said standing up from his seat.

'I'm Krishnamoorthy, senior researcher. I have been asked to assist you. Hope you write something about our efforts in The Hindu'

'Nice meeting you, this is Maya, she is a research scholar from Corea.'

'Glad to meet you both, come this way please.'

'Sir why is there so much security here?' Maya asked.

'Last year we caught a few spies who were posing as defectors. They were sent here to kill the resident defectors and blowup this place.'

'Where are they now?'

'Dead. They consumed cyanide as soon as they were confronted.'

'How many refugees stay at this facility?'

'We can accommodate around 2500 people in a year, and 400 simultaneously. Right now, there are only around a 100 refugees undergoing training, the rest have finished their course and have settled elsewhere.'

'I don't understand.'

'You do know the government operates this support facility for newcomers from Hindustan to help them resettle in Dravidian society? Every year, around 4000 Hindustanis defect to Dravida, but they do not all come at the same time. They arrive individually or in small groups at different times, whenever they manage to escape.'

'What happens after they are sent here?' Maya asked taking down notes, as she walked.

'We offer a three-month resettlement course for social adjustment in our country. The ultimate objective is to instill confidence, narrow the cultural gap, and motivate them to achieve sustainable livelihoods in a new environment. We also have a team of psychologists and sociologists to watch over them.'

'Is that necessary?'

'Absolutely. The level of economic development is so different between both countries that they get a culture shock. The per capita income in Hindustan is only $800, while in Dravida it is $32,000.'

'Even Corea has a per capita GDP of only $3,000, but it was not such a big shock for me.'

'Maya, we are not just talking of per capita GDP but also the quality of life. Millions of people die in Hindustan every year because they cannot afford food to eat and clothes to wear. Corea is a democracy, where at least the basic necessities are available,' Naga intervened.

'I heard that food rations, housing, healthcare, and education are offered free in Hindustan, and they have also abolished taxes.'

'There is big difference between propaganda and reality. Maybe you will change your opinion after speaking to a few defectors,' Krishnamoorthy said, swiping his card against the security bar, and unlocking the doors.

'What happens after they finish training?' Maya continued.

'After the course, they get citizenship cards within two weeks so that they can apply for a passport. The government rents a small apartment for the defectors and gives them some cash and incentives for their employment, education and medical support.'

'Do they adjust well after they go out in the society?'

'Unfortunately, we have found that they take a long time to adjust to Dravidian society and its level of development, but we are constantly updating our training techniques.'

'How many people have trained here so far?'

'Today there are close to 1.2 million defectors living in Dravida. This Center was only established in 1985, so we have trained around 700,000 people.'

'Where do these defectors stay? In Madras?'

'No, they are all sent to different provinces. Each province has a yearly quota for accepting these defectors. Here, this is the cafeteria. I have arranged for a few defectors to come here in turns so you can talk to them.'

Krishnamoorthy went to the counter to order a few drinks and snacks, while they seated themselves at a table.

A few minutes later a young girl in her teens walked in. Krishnamoorthy approached her, exchanged a few words and then brought her to their table.

'This is Kavita, she is 20 years old, and is from Basantpur in Bihar province. Her father died when she was just three. At that time Hindustan was in the grip of a famine which eventually killed three million people.'

'Can she speak English?' Maya asked.

'Unfortunately, she cannot. She knows only Maithili and a little Hindi. Don't worry I can translate for you,' Krishnamoorthy said.

Her story touched Maya's heart, and brought tears to her eyes. She was not aware that conditions were so bad in Hindustan.

Kavita began by telling them about her childhood, when her mother was still alive. She recalled going up to the mountains and growing food without being seen. Her mother and sister did the farming and she would walk four hours to the market and help sell whatever they could grow. At times they even caught wild rabbits and fowl to sell.

When she was 12, her mother died, after a small cut in her foot led to a serious infection. There were no hospitals nearby and the closest was 200 kilometers away in the capital of the province. She and her sister had to survive on

their own without any family or social support, looking out for wild animals, and surviving on tree bark and wild fruits. In the winter of 2002, they decided to escape with four other orphans, by crossing the freezing Koshi River in the dead of the night. Two girls were shot by the border patrol, but the rest managed to escape to Rajbiraj in Nepal. One of her friends had a relative in the village, who instead re-directed them to another Nepali family in Kathmandu who they said would put them up.

Their host lived in a small tin shed in the suburbs of the city. One portion of the shed was given to the three girls, and they realized to their horror that they were expected to provide sexual services to tourists. Their room was locked from the outside, and they received only food, no pay, and were forbidden from going out. It was like a dark prison with no means of escape. After 11 months Kavita's sister managed to escape, but there was a police raid and she and the other girl were deported back to Hindustan. They were imprisoned in a labor camp in Thar Desert, where they were forced to do hard labor, in unhygienic conditions. Many women died because of the harsh weather, and they would regularly dump bodies outside.

After 18 months Kavita had an unexpected visitor, her sister's boyfriend who had escaped to Dravida. He had hired a broker, located her and bribed the guards to let her go. She had to hike to the mountainous region of Tibet, then a land journey to Burma then by boat and by foot in Thailand. The broker left her at the gates of the Dravidian Embassy, and she finally arrived in Madras. The whole deal cost her sister around $15,000.

'If Hindustan provides free food, education and medical care, why did she have to escape?' Naga asked Maya, raising his eyebrows.

Krishnamoorthy responded, 'Those benefits are primarily for the privileged residents of Delhi, Bombay, and Calcutta. The rest of the citizens are left to fend for themselves. Many young men join the army because it ensures at least some food. That's why Hindustan boasts the largest standing army in the world.'

Maya inquired further, 'How big is their army?'

'The total armed forces strength is 7 million,' Krishnamoorthy explained. 'For comparison, China has the next largest force with 2.7 million. Hindustan follows a military-first policy, allocating significant resources to defense. Addi-

tionally, the Soviet Union maintains bases there as a counterbalance to American bases in Dravida.'

'What does the military-first policy entail?'

'It means that the armed forces take precedence in all state affairs,' Krishnamoorthy clarified. 'National resources flow to the army first, shaping their political and economic system.'

Maya pondered, 'But do they really need to spend so much on their military?'

'Given their long and porous borders, with Pakistan and Dravida as main adversaries, and the need to guard friendly borders too, the substantial military expenditure becomes necessary,' Krishnamoorthy replied. 'And now, here comes our next guest—a defector from the Hindustan army—who might shed more light.'

Rakesh approached them, smiling. His tale was even more horrifying, and he had managed to defect on his third attempt. His harrowing experiences left Maya shaken. She wondered how her democratic country could maintain friendly relations with a regime that treated its citizens so brutally.

On the return journey, two hours later, Maya sat in silence as Naga cruised his car on the expressway, occasionally shaking her head in disapproval.

'Are you convinced now?' Naga asked.

'It seems unbelievable. How did Hindustan become a dictatorship? I heard it was a democracy even after the civil war,' Maya replied.

'Yes, actually, it was a multi-party democracy for eight years after the civil war. Indira Nehru was the Prime Minister, and her party won two consecutive elections: in 1967 after the civil war and in 1971 after the Bangladesh war.'

'What happened then?'

'There were many allegations that she won the 1971 elections through fraud. Protests and *satyagrahas* erupted, with students and labor unions leading the agitation. It gradually spread across Hindustan. A court case was filed against her for election fraud and misuse of state machinery. The court found her guilty and banned her from contesting any elections for ten years.'

'She retaliated by becoming a dictator?'

'It wasn't that straightforward. Despite being a democrat at heart—being Nehru's daughter—she initially wanted to resign. However, those around her, fearing a loss of power, poisoned her mind.'

'What did they tell her?'

'They convinced her that she could retain power democratically by imposing an internal emergency. They cited threats to national security from Pakistan and Dravida, along with challenges posed by drought and the oil crisis, which had crippled the economy. The strikes and protests were paralyzing policies and hurting the country's economy.'

'What is an internal emergency?'

'Although Dravida drafted a new Constitution, Hindustan continued to use the old one drafted under Nehru. Article 352 of their Constitution allowed the government to grant itself extraordinary powers and suspend democratic freedoms for citizens. It enabled her to launch a massive crackdown on civil liberties, imprisoning thousands of opponents. She rewrote laws, bypassing parliament entirely, and converted Hindustan into a single-party rule modeled after the Soviet Union, with the help of Brezhnev.'

'But it's not a communist country like the Soviet Union, is it?'

'They label themselves democratic socialists but follow the same communist party rules. At the top of the Congress Party is the Central Committee, elected at party conferences. The committee then votes for a Presidium and Secretariat. The Chairman of the Presidium becomes the President of Hindustan.'

'And she manages to stay in control by always getting her nominees elected?'

'Yes. Feudal mentality persists, partly due to poverty and illiteracy. She also declared Hinduism the national religion, polarizing the majority population in her favor. Being Nehru's daughter, everyone believes she's entitled to absolute power.'

'Is that why her son is now the President?'

'After her assassination by bodyguards loyal to the banned Democratic Janata Party in 1984, her younger son took over.'

'Younger son?'

'Her elder son had a falling out. He studied in Europe and believes in democratic traditions. He resides in Italy with his wife and children.'

'Do you think he'll return if Sanjay Nehru dies?'

'Unlikely. Sanjay has a son being groomed to take over.'

'Like a family business?'

'A democratic socialist family business. Although if Rajiv returns from Italy, he might reintroduce democracy, bringing peace.'

'Do you think that's likely?'

'I hope so, but it's challenging. We've seen what happened to Gorbachev after introducing glasnost in the Soviet Union. The military didn't allow him to continue as President and installed their own leader.'

'Anyway, today's meetings have really opened my eyes.'

'That's why I arranged them. What time do you need to meet Professor Ganapathy?'

'He said three. What time is it now?'

'It's two. Let's have lunch, and I'll drop you off. You can stay in the library after the meeting. I need to show my face at the office briefly. Keep your mobile switched on.'

•••

Professor Ganapathy was reading *The Hindu* in the reference section when Maya spotted him.

'Good afternoon, sir,' she greeted.

'Hello there, I've been waiting for you,' he replied.

'Thank you for remembering.'

'Let's go outside; they demand complete silence in here.'

Grabbing his walking stick, he led her to a bench beneath a neem tree and motioned for her to sit down beside him.

'Did you read my article?' he asked.

'Yes. Do you still believe your theory?' Maya inquired, ready to jot down notes.

'What theory?'

'The one about socialist countries prospering in the long term while capitalist countries born out of civil war collapse?'

'Absolutely. History has shown it to be true.'

'Not in the case of Dravida and Hindustan.'

'Look, there's no hard and fast 20- or 30-year rule. It could take another decade, but certainly, I see brighter prospects for Hindustan.'

'Even if it's a dictatorship?'

'Young lady, in a diverse country like Hindustan, where every section of society is pulling the country in different directions, it takes a dictatorship to restore order.'

'But can't order be restored democratically, like in Corea?'

'Corea is a homogenous country with a unique culture, and everyone speaks the same language. Hindustan is different—it has so many diverse cultures and languages mixed together.'

'Sir, my country isn't homogenous either. We may believe we have pure blood and the same culture, but there are serious regional imbalances, especially between Honam and Yeongnam.'

'The problem may be due to economic imbalances, not necessarily cultural differences. I'm talking about different races.'

'Different races? Sir, I thought you believed there's no race difference in the subcontinent.'

'Who told you that?'

'I overheard you arguing with Professor Cadwell at the conference.'

'You misunderstood. I was saying that there's no inherent difference between Aryans and Dravidians. I didn't claim that Hindustanis are purely Aryans. They also include Mongolians and a mix of other races.'

'But Dravida has no Mongolians. So, is it a single race?'

'That's true. Aryans and Dravidians are subsects of the same race, and in Dravida, we have only Aryans and Dravidians.'

'Sir, it's a bit confusing.'

'No, it isn't if you stop believing the theory that Aryans conquered the Dravidians. European historians confused our identity by dividing us into two distinct races based solely on skin color.'

'What do you believe, then?'

'Not believe—know. All the people on the subcontinent, including Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Ceylone, belong to one race. We may look different, but genetically, we're the same.'

'So, what does that mean?'

'It means there's no reason for each of these countries to oppose each other. We can all live together as one country with a single identity.'

'But that's not possible, sir. If you had your way, Corea, China, and Japan should be one country.'

'Ideally, yes, but I know it's not practical. I'm merely suggesting that we stop fighting against each other, claiming we're different races.'

'Today's divisions aren't just about race; they're also about power, culture, language, and ideology.'

'All man-made divisions. That's why I appreciate the efforts in Europe—15 diverse countries forming the European Union.'

'Do you think it'll last? Soviet Union and its allies still aren't part of the union, even though they're European.'

'I hope they join. It'll demonstrate that man-made differences don't matter, and we can all grow together.'

'Isn't that an ideal situation that may never happen?'

'Today, it appears difficult, but one never knows about tomorrow. I hope South and East Asia also learn from the European Union. It could lead to global peace, if America doesn't intervene.'

'Why does everyone blame America for all the world's problems?'

'They create many problems by meddling in other countries where they shouldn't.'

'What about the Soviet Union? They meddle even more, but no one seems to mind.'

'That's not true. The Soviet Union intervenes only after America makes the first move.'

'Sir, you know that's not true. Remember Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Afghanistan? The Soviet Union even intervened in India before America came to Dravida's rescue.'

'No, that's not true. The Soviet Union supported Hindustan's military because America was secretly supporting Dravida. If America hadn't intervened, we'd still be one country.'

'Were you against the civil war here?'

'I've argued countless times about the futility of it all. The British did us a favor by making us one country. Certain politicians divided us—first based on religion and the second on language'

'Sir, Dravida has seen significant development, and it seems everyone is content,' Maya observed.

'That's the perception from the outside. However, the reality is that internal divisions exist. There's a palpable social tension. While many are affluent, a sub-

stantial number of the poor feel marginalized and could potentially revolt. For instance, the people of Kerala feel overlooked, given that we've never had a President from their province, despite having one from Ceylone, which joined Dravida only in 1980.'

'I have friends from Kerala, and they appear quite satisfied with life here,' Maya commented.

'They're likely from the middle class. The middle class often fails to voice the true aspirations of the most impactful group—the working class.'

'I believe the middle class truly reflects society's aspirations. They've been the catalyst for revolutions and societal changes globally.'

'Such a view is naive. Historically, it's been the working class and students who have initiated revolutions.'

'Many of those students come from middle-class backgrounds. Sir, does that make you a communist?'

'Don't label me as such. The communists have tarnished our cause. Marx was a profound thinker. I align myself with democratic socialism.'

'Similar to Hindustan's ideology?'

'In a manner of speaking, yes.'

'Isn't it remarkable that in Dravida, you can openly declare yourself a democratic socialist, whereas in Hindustan, expressing capitalist views could lead to exile in Thar or Nagpur?'

'Your words are quite forthright, young lady.'

'I apologize, sir. It's just that my perspective shifted after meeting the defectors today.'

'You visited the resettlement camp in Tambaram?'

'Yes, and their accounts of life in Hindustan were harrowing.'

'Be wary of their stories; they've been indoctrinated. Not everything they say is the truth.'

'Their tales of starvation and torture seemed genuine. At least here, they're treated with the dignity they deserve.'

'My visits to Delhi and lectures to the students there painted a different picture. I saw no signs of starvation or torture. They may not be as prosperous as Dravida, but they live in a fair and equitable society.'

'Did your travels in Hindustan extend beyond Delhi?'

'Indeed, they took us to Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Lucknow, and Calcutta. The citizens appeared satisfied with their lives, supported by the government's provision of free education and medical care.'

'Were you accompanied on these trips?'

'Yes, we traveled as a group with guides provided to us.'

'Why do you think there's such a significant number of defectors from Hindustan here, yet none travel in the opposite direction?'

'Our society has become engulfed in materialism, driven by the consumerist culture propagated by American corporations. The simplicity of life and basic needs no longer hold value for most.'

'If the opportunity arose, would you choose to live in Hindustan?'

'I'm of an age where such a move isn't feasible. Though I do wish for a united India—a truly democratic socialist nation.'

'And if you were younger?'

'Without a doubt, I would have made the move.'

'Then why didn't you, during your youth at the time of the civil war?'

'I had the desire, but personal circumstances—Vijaylaxmi's pregnancy and Subbaiah's counsel—prevented me.'

'Vijaylaxmi?'

'My late wife. She was expecting at the time. I miss her dearly.'

'How many children do you have, sir?'

'Two—a son who's an economist at the IMF in New York, and a daughter pursuing history at Cambridge University.'

'Do they visit you?'

'They return home annually. My traveling days are behind me; age has taken its toll.'

'You mentioned Subbaiah stopped you. Who is he?'

'My dearest friend and former superior at the department. We lived as neighbors and shared a close bond.'

'Did he oppose the civil war as well?'

'Not at all. He was a pivotal figure in the movement, galvanizing the students and causing a stir within the government.'

'In what way? Did he share your democratic socialist views?'

'No, his beliefs were rooted in the free market system, and he held America in high regard. Despite our ideological differences, we had immense respect for each other. His absence is deeply felt,' he said, gazing into the distance.

'Where is your friend now?'

At this question, Ganapathy's expression hardened. He rose abruptly from the bench, grasped his walking stick, and began to walk away in silence.

'Sir... I apologize if I've caused any distress. May we speak again?'

Ganapathy paused and turned back.

'You remind me of a young exchange student from Corea I met during the civil war. Your curiosity, the endless questions—it's all very familiar. In fact, you even bear a resemblance to him. Let's meet here again tomorrow, same time. But please, no more questions about Subbaiah!'

CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS

Moon awoke to the strains of devotional music and the tinkling of bells. His entire body ached, and his left arm, encased in plaster, throbbed painfully. Drenched in sweat, he attempted to rise, but weakness overwhelmed him.

'What happened? Where am I? How did I get here?' Moon's voice trembled as he surveyed his unfamiliar surroundings.

The oversized half-sleeve vest and colorful striped lungi he wore were not his own.

The room filled with the sweet scent of incense, accompanied by distant singing and more bell chimes. Desperate for answers, Moon struggled to sit up, but his legs remained asleep. He stumbled, accidentally knocking over a stainless-steel pail of water near the cot.

'Are you OK?' A concerned voice called from outside.

It was Professor Subbaiah's wife, Malathi. She rushed in, still clutching a prayer bell, her wet hair wrapped in a white towel.

'I'm fine,' Moon managed, pulling himself up despite the pain. 'But how did I end up here?'

Subbaiah entered, newspaper in hand. 'You nearly died in the stampede,' he explained. 'I apologize for insisting you attend the meeting. We should have anticipated the chaos.'

Moon pressed further. 'Where did you find me?'

'In the hospital,' Subbaiah replied. 'The police couldn't identify you, but Inspector Balasubramanium, who knows Ganapathy, contacted us. They allowed us to bring you here once they realized you were a foreigner.'

Moon's memory stirred. 'What happened yesterday? Did Anna and the other leaders come?'

'No,' Subbaiah said grimly. 'All public meetings were banned. Nine people died, and thousands were injured in the stampede on Marina Beach. The meeting aimed to protest the Prime Minister's decision to make Hindi the sole national language starting August 1, 1965.'

Moon scanned the newspaper article handed to him. Eyewitnesses disputed the police's claims of unruly elements provoking the firing. The festive atmosphere turned chaotic when the police announced the meeting's cancellation.

'What's next?' Moon asked.

'Protests have already begun,' Subbaiah replied. 'People are burning public buildings, trains, and buses.'

'And our safety?' Moon turned to Malathi. 'Shouldn't we return to Hyderabad?'

Malathi worriedly mentioned their dwindling food supplies. 'We need rice and fresh vegetables. Mohan's shop opens at six; he also sells milk.'

Moon checked his wallet—only 20 rupees. Malathi, resourceful, produced emergency savings. 'Women,' Moon teased, grateful for her foresight.

As Subbaiah left, Moon asked about the bathroom. Malathi assisted him, saying, 'You'd do the same for us, wouldn't you?'

'Of course,' Moon replied, limping toward the bathroom. 'Thank you for everything.'

•••

Thirty minutes later, Subbaiah returned, panting, carrying a week's provisions from Mohan's store. His announcement echoed through the house as Malathi prepared dosas in the kitchen.

'What did Senthil say?' Malathi emerged, her concern evident.

'We're organizing another demonstration on Marina Beach this evening,' Subbaiah replied. 'Indira may not realize our strength.'

'But public meetings are banned,' Malathi protested. 'How will Anna and others attend?'

'In disguise,' Subbaiah explained. 'We won't have a stage. And yes, there's risk, but we must resist.'

Moon, limping from his room, joined the conversation. 'Is it safe?'

'Revolution requires sacrifice,' Subbaiah asserted. 'Nine died yesterday, including you.'

'Senthil mentioned protests in other cities,' Malathi added.

'Bangalore, Hyderabad, Cochin,' Subbaiah confirmed. 'We're not alone.'

Moon expressed concern about his belongings. 'My luggage is in the hostel.'

'Don't worry,' Subbaiah assured him. 'I'll retrieve it after my meeting.'

'And the toilet paper rolls,' Moon reminded.

'Of course,' Subbaiah chuckled. 'Now, Malathi, what's for breakfast? *Dosas*?'

Moon inquired about *dosas*. 'What are they?'

'Rice and dal pancakes,' Malathi explained. 'We'll have them with *sambar* and *chutney*.'

Moon shared his Corean breakfast: 'Rice, soup, and *kimchi*.'

'Experience our culture,' Subbaiah encouraged. 'India's uncertain now.'

'Could it lead to secession?' Moon wondered.

'It's possible,' Subbaiah admitted. 'But I'll keep you safe.'

As Malathi announced breakfast, the room filled with the aroma of *dosas*.

•••

'Hello young man,' Ganapathy said from across yard, seeing Moon on the patio chair staring at the clouds with a blank expression on his face.

'Hello sir,' Moon replied startled.

How are you feeling now? Where is Subbaiah?'

'I'm better. Professor Subbaiah has gone for a party meeting.'

'That same nonsense again. What are they doing to our nation?'

'Is the University closed today sir?'

'Of course, it is. There is so much violence no one will send their children to study. I will just put on my shirt and come there. I too am feeling a bit bored.'

A few minutes later, Ganapathy was by his side.'

'*Anni*,' he called out to Malathi who was listening to her favorite radio program inside.

'*Thammudu*,'she replied coming out.

'Can I have a nice cup of filter coffee?' he requested, dragging a chair from inside.

'Sure, I will be right back.'

'Sir, you just called Maam *Anni*. What does it mean?'

It means elder sister-in-law in Tamil. I consider Subbaiah as my elder brother, she called me younger brother in Telugu.'

'It is so strange. In Corean, *eonni* means elder sister.'

'That is a coincidence.'

'I don't think so. I came across other words like *amma* and *appa*. We also have the similar words. How can we have the same words, is Tamil related to Corean?'

'Not that I know of. Tamil is one of the longest surviving classical languages in the world and is the only Indian language other than Sanskrit to be considered as ancient and authentically original in its form.'

'Is it possible that some Tamilians settled down in East Asia and influenced our language?'

'That is possible, the Chola Dynasty which ruled from 9th to 13th century also expanded to Southeast Asia. They may have had a cultural influence on Corea.'

'Chola dynasty?'

'In ancient times there were three kingdoms in Southern Indian; Cholas, Cheras and Pandyas who were very powerful.'

'Just like in Corea again. We too had three kingdoms -Goguryeo, Baekje and Silla, which dominated the peninsula.'

'This is so strange. It appears that there are many similarities. I better alert Professor Dhandapani, I am sure he will find more. This needs more careful historical research.'

'Yes sir, I am sure they will find a lot of similarities, except of course the looks.'

'You are right,' he smiled, as Malathi placed two cups of coffee on the small stool near them and went inside again. It somehow broke their conversation.

'Sir, will everything be alright here?' Moon asked trying to pick up a new thread.

'I am afraid not. This time it is getting to be very serious, I only hope there is a peaceful solution.'

'You mean if the Prime Minister takes back her announcement?'

'No, I mean if the Tamil politicians accept Hindi, then we can carry on with our lives.'

'The other day you explained to me that it is unfair to impose Hindi, just as it is unfair to impose German in Europe.'

'Yes, I did, but India is not Europe. We became independent 18 years ago, and have already broken up our country once. This is a silly issue to fight for when we have so much poverty. We need to first grow to the European levels of development and then think about all these mundane issues.'

'Isn't it a question of identity? The Japanese tried to wipe out our identity when they ruled us, Professor Subbaiah's party is afraid that the Dravdian identity may be wiped out.'

'That is stretching things a bit too far, many Congress leaders are from the South. If they have no problems, then why should we fear? These small parties only want to come to power, and they will do anything to achieve their goals.'

'Sir, do you support the Congress party?'

'Yes, I do, they fought for our independence and they are the only secular party which cares for our country's development.'

'That is not what Professor Subbaiah told me.'

'The main goal of his party is to humiliate Brahmins.'

'I heard that Tamil Brahmins are dominating the society and practicing casteism.'

'That is their old argument. They are reluctant to accept us as Tamilians because they say that our ancestors migrated from North India.'

'You mean to say that your community was actually Aryan?'

'There are no Aryans and no Dravidians. We all belong to the same race, this division was created by the British and other European scholars.'

'Sir, you look different from the other Tamilians, you are fairer and could be easily mistaken for a North Indian.'

'Color and facial appearance have nothing to do with race.'

'So, then Coreans could also be the same race as Tamilians, since we have many common words in the language?'

'That is a bit far-fetched. You are clearly the Mongolian race. A little intermixing may have taken place years ago, but that is for the anthropologists to find out, I am an economics professor.'

'You were saying that Tamil Brahmins are not accepted by other castes in South India? '

'Yes, to get back to the point, Subbaiah's party is trying to push us away by saying that we are proficient in Sanskrit, and are Aryans. Actually the older generations of Brahmins were more interested in Tamil than Sanskrit. Many of them were scholars in Tamil and Sanskrit. Now they want to associate Tamil with the anti-Brahmin movement. This is a very clever strategy to isolate us.'

'Is it true that most of the important positions in government are held by Brahmins?'

'That is because many Brahmins gave importance to education. With good education, anyone can get important positions. The other castes did not give importance to education, and concentrated on their traditional skills, but once they saw that the Brahmins have occupied important positions, they are upset.'

'Didn't they have important positions in ancient India too?'

'We do not have factual information about the status of Tamil Brahmins before the British came to India. There were many Brahmin Ministers and officials under the Kings, but a vast majority of them were middle class or poor and dependent on the temples for their livelihood.'

'They did not always have power?'

'Even now they do not have as much power as they make you believe. I will tell you one thing for certain; when East India Company first came to India it was the trading community and not the Brahmins who prospered. The caste-based hierarchy has never represented the balance of power. Everyone accepts that Brahmins are the final authority in respect of religion, that's all.'

'They occupy the highest position in your caste system.'

'That is right, but we were never considered as a ruling class. The lower caste Kshatriyas, were the rulers and the trading was left to people from Subbaiah's community, Vysyas. Only in respect of religion, Brahmins were supreme. So it is wrong to say that we always had power. We are a deeply misunderstood community.'

'Then why are they against you?'

'It is all politics, as I told you before. Look I am a Brahmin by birth, but I eat non-vegetarian and am an atheist, completely against the caste system. Many Tamil Brahmins were in the forefront for social reforms like women's education, rights and abolition of child marriage. But Subbaiah's party wants to ignore everything, and that is why I am against them.'

'You seem to be very close to each other despite the differences.'

'We have our ideological differences, but still respect each other. We are like brothers.'

'Good to know, sir.'

'So, you will be staying here for some time?'

'Maa'm insists that I stay till I recover.'

'What about your clothes and luggage?'

'Professor Subbaiah said he will bring them after his meeting.'

'Nice, since there will be no classes now, I can come and chat with you regularly.'

'Although you are against the imposition of Hindi, won't you participate in the protests?'

'Absolutely not. I don't wish for DMK to gain power.'

•••

Subbaiah returned home for lunch, bringing with him fresh news and Moon's luggage.

'Malathi,' he called out from the front porch.

'You're home?' she inquired, stepping out of the kitchen. 'Moon is resting; please keep your voice down.'

'How's he doing?'

'He seems to be recovering. Thammudu spent some time with him earlier.'

'I've got something important to tell you.'

'What is it?'

'I believe it's best for you to travel to Hyderabad and stay with your mother for a while.'

'Why's that?'

'The situation here is deteriorating.'

'In what way?'

'If our assembly is obstructed today, we've resolved to initiate a forceful protest.'

'That's fine. I was around in January. The campus remained undisturbed.'

'Malathi, this situation is unique. We're prepared to campaign for an independent nation, and the other states have consented to our strategy.'

'An independent nation? Similar to Pakistan?'

'Exactly. Indira has cornered us, leaving no alternative. Anna is set to declare it tonight.'

'That sounds absurd.'

'I'm aware, and while we might not prevail, without a threat, they'll persist in their obstinacy.'

'So, it's merely a negotiating ploy?'

'At the moment, yes. But should they resort to violence to suppress our cause, we'll genuinely contend for it. Andhra, Mysore, and Kerala support us. They'll initiate comparable protests.'

'Why not accompany me? We could avoid all this turmoil. I'm genuinely concerned.'

'That wouldn't be proper. I'm responsible for organizing the student demonstrations. Plus, if we succeed, I've been assured a significant role in the party and the forthcoming government.'

'You're an academic. We have no need for a political post. What if you're harmed? There could be extensive violence. Please heed my words.'

'Malathi, don't be as irrational as your mother. This is something I must undertake. Nonetheless, I'll visit Hyderabad next week. I also need to liaise with other parties in Andhra.'

'When must I depart?'

'Your ticket is arranged. The Howrah Mail leaves at five. Unfortunately, I couldn't secure a direct train. In Vijayawada, your carriage will be transferred to another train, so there's no concern. I'm uncertain if any trains or buses will operate tomorrow.'

'I lack the time to prepare additional meals for you. What will you eat?'

'Don't fret, we'll get by. Perhaps Moon could instruct me in preparing noodle soup. Don't worry about me.'

'And Moon? Shouldn't he return to his homeland?' 'I've considered that. He's yet to fully recuperate. If conditions worsen in a week, I'll procure a flight ticket for him to return. Alternatively, he could sail.'

'Why not consult Thammudu and tell him to contact his brother-in-law in Delhi? He might have further insights, and Indira might yield.'

'A sound suggestion. I'll act on it. Place Moon's luggage in our bedroom. It's best not to disturb him now. I'll return shortly; meanwhile, you complete the cooking and begin packing.'

•••

It was midnight when Subbaiah returned from Marina Beach.

Moon sat anxiously on the porch, listening to what sounded like firecrackers. Ganapathy had briefly chatted with him before retiring home. His brother-in-law had warned that Indira was serious about making Hindi the national language, as her political survival depended on it. 'Stay indoors,' he had advised.

Malathi had left for Hyderabad, and the silence in the house was driving Moon crazy.

'Still awake?' Subbaiah asked, spotting Moon on the cane chair in the dim moonlight.

'What happened, sir? Is everything OK?'

'No, of course not. They are forcing our hand.'

'Sir?'

'They called in the army—against their own citizens! They prevented us from having any meeting. Anna and Karunanidhi managed to escape, but many people have been arrested.'

'Was there violence like yesterday?'

'Much worse. Unbelievable. How can Indira use the army against us?'

'What will happen now?'

'A fight to the death. We need a separate country. Why don't you go to sleep? I have to leave again; we have a meeting to decide our future course of action.'

'Sir, can you help me switch on the radio? I tried, but could not connect to BBC News.'

'Oh sure,' Subbaiah said, turning a few knobs. 'It takes time for the frequency to be caught. I will take a bath and then leave. Did you eat anything?'

'Yes, Maa'm put some food in my room.'

As Subbaiah walked toward his bedroom, the radio in the living room sputtered to life—just in time for the BBC news report.

> *Heavy gunfire is being heard on Marina Beach as anti-Hindi demonstrators continue to defy curfew in Madras. Ambulances were seen heading to the area, and at least thirty fatalities have been reported so far, with more than 1,500 others injured, according to officials and doctors quoted by the news agencies.*
>
> *Witnesses said the military allowed thousands of Congress party supporters, armed with hockey sticks and knives, to enter the area. Opposition groups claim the government sent in thugs to suppress anti-Hindi protests.*
>
> *Our correspondent said the army seemed to be standing by and facilitating the clashes. Though initially put on the backfoot by the sudden at-*

tack, determined anti-government protesters appear to be winning the battle. Witnesses also reported that pro-Congress supporters were dragging away protesters they had managed to grab and handing them over to security forces.

Fighting is taking place around army tanks deployed around the beach, with stones bouncing off the armored vehicles. Several groups are involved in fistfights. The opposition also alleges that many among the pro-Congress crowd are policemen in plain clothes. They have reportedly seized police identification cards from the pro-Congress demonstrators...

Moon started sweating, and it was not because of his fever.

As the news report continued, rambling off shocking details of assault, he wondered what options he had. Still very weak, he wouldn't be able to catch a flight home in this condition. He had to bear it out for one more week, cooped up in Subbaiah's home.

PAR FOR THE COURSE

'So, how did your meeting with the crazy old man go?' Naga asked Maya as she got into his car.

He had been waiting for her to emerge from the university gates for close to 20 minutes now and was even tempted to interrupt their meeting when he suddenly saw Ganapathy walking away at a brisk pace. Maya was not far behind.

'He talked a little about your father but shut down as soon as he realized it,' she said, approaching the car.

'That's great. What did he say?'

'They were close friends, almost like brothers.'

'I was right all along. But something is fishy. Why is he hiding that fact?'

'He still speaks affectionately, and it is apparent he misses him.'

'Then why can't he talk to me?'

'There is something he is holding back, maybe some dark secret. We have to find out.'

'It is possible that he helped the Hindustan agents kidnap my father. After all, he was the one who reported Nanagaru's kidnapping.'

'Naga, I don't think that is possible. The police investigations did not throw up anything.'

'We are talking about police investigations 30 years ago. They did not have modern facilities then. I would be the least surprised if it were true. From what you told me, he was against the civil war and continues to praise Hindustan.'

'That doesn't mean a thing. I am sure many people were against the civil war. Anyway, I have to meet him again tomorrow. Maybe I can get out some more information.'

'I have an idea. Why don't you record the conversation? I can give you the digital pen-recorder that I use for my interviews.'

'Are you sure? Wouldn't it be cheating?'

'He is lying, and I see no other way out,' he said, slowing down the car. 'There appears to be a massive traffic jam ahead. I hate this peak hour traffic. Why does everyone have to drive? We have an excellent subway and public transport.'

'You could ask the question to yourself,' Maya said, looking ahead.

'You are right,' Naga replied sheepishly, switching on the traffic channel on his car radio.

For travelers on Beach Road, there has been a bomb blast near Parliament, and traffic has come to a standstill. All the approach roads have been blocked. You are advised to avoid this route.

According to Eenadu News Agency, four people have died, and seven are injured in what appears to be another terrorist attack. Although no group has claimed responsibility, police sources say it appears to be the handiwork of the Telangana Freedom Army...

'We will have to turn back and take the Flag Staff road,' he said, shifting to the first lane for a U-turn.

'Is this the group that wants to join Hindustan?'

'Yeah, they are funded and trained by those bastards in Delhi.'

'You said earlier that they are a small minority.'

'Very small, but quite organized. We will track them down and wipe them clean.'

'So where are we going now?'

'It will take some time for the road to clear. Do you want to see a Tamil movie?'

'You have to translate all the dialogs for me.'

'That won't be necessary. There are a couple of theaters that show regional movies with English subtitles. Our government is trying to make Madras more foreigner-friendly since we have a big expatriate crowd. There is even a blueprint to make it the business and tourist hub of Asia.'

'You mean like Singapore?'

'Yes, the plan is to give Singapore tough competition by making Madras more attractive for businesses.'

'Don't you think companies may be afraid to invest because of your problems with Hindustan? What if there is another war?'

'There won't be another war. Hindustan does not have the economic strength to survive if there is one. All their threats are just for keeping their citizens under control. You saw what happened after the previous war in 1993;

their economy was shattered, and they are yet to recover. Half their population starves.'

'Foreigners don't necessarily think so.'

'You know, it is all media hype. The foreign reporters here have to justify their salaries, so they constantly blow up the situation. The only thing they report on is our tension, which is exploited by Hindustan. Every time there is a report, the global markets go for a spin. I won't be surprised if the reporters make profits on the stock market. No one here believes there will be war.'

'Fine, I understand. Which movie do you want to see?'

'Let us see the latest Rajanikanth movie, *Chandramukhi*. I told you he is planning to run for President this year; you will see why he is so popular.'

'Is he your favorite actor?' Moon asked, referring to the poster of Rajanikanth on the wall.

'No, I prefer Kamalhaasan. He's more talented, though Rajanikanth has mass appeal,' Naga replied.

'You don't consider yourself part of the masses?'

'I didn't say that. Kamalhaasan's films are thought-provoking, while Rajanikanth's action-musicals are more entertaining, requiring no deep thought.'

'How old is Rajanikanth?'

'He's 55, but still does action musicals.'

'Really? At 55?'

'Yes, he wears a wig to appear younger.'

'And Kamalhaasan?'

'He's 51.'

'Why are all your popular actors older?'

'We have younger actors, but they lack the charisma of these two.'

'Is Kamalhaasan into politics?'

'He won't be successful.'

'Why not?'

'He's a Brahmin.'

'What does that have to do with politics?'

'In Dravida, being considered Aryan, it's tough for a Brahmin to win elections.'

'So, a Brahmin can't win elections in Dravida?'

'They can, but it's a disadvantage.'

'Does that mean Rajanikanth could win because he's not a Brahmin?'

'Not just that. He's popular across all provinces.'

'What's his caste?'

'His family is from Maharashtra, in Hindustan. Born in Bangalore, his Maratha caste is considered Dravidian.'

'It's confusing. Are Aryans and Dravidians different races?'

'I don't think so, though some Brahmins might.'

'Isn't it odd for a democratic country to discriminate based on caste?'

'We don't discriminate against Brahmins. They can run for office and will win if they've done good work.'

'What's your caste, Naga?'

'I don't believe in the caste system. My family is kapu from Andhra, traditionally farmers turned traders.'

'That explains your stance on Brahmins.'

'I have nothing against them. They've been powerful for centuries. If there's reverse discrimination now, it's deserved.'

'That's not what Professor Ganapathy believes.'

'He's a Brahmin, so he would say that.'

'It seems your country is deeply divided by caste.'

Naga remained silent; indeed, unlike Hindustan where religion played a pivotal role in local politics, Dravida's issues primarily revolved around caste and ethnicity.

Maya noticed a heavily barricaded road to her right. A couple of US Army trucks were stationed on one side, with around a dozen armed soldiers milling around.

'What is that road? Why is it blocked with soldiers?' she asked.

'That's the entrance to Rajan Garrison, the headquarters of the American military in Dravida,' Naga explained.

'In the center of the city?'

'Yes, precisely. It's a legacy of our civil war. President Narsimhan aims to relocate them away from the city center, but negotiations are ongoing. The move would free up prime space in Madras.'

Maya observed high walls topped with electrified fences and security cameras lining one side of the road, stretching endlessly.

'How large is this facility?' she inquired.

'The garrison covers around 620 acres, akin to a small US township. It includes housing areas, a large commissary, post exchange, recreation facilities, restaurants, sports complexes, a library, hospital, schools, and even a gas station. There's also a hotel within the compound.'

'Wow. How many people reside in this town?'

Currently, about 40,000. There are four other US Army bases in Dravida: Mangalore, Hyderabad, Vishakhapatnam, and Cochin. The total US army presence will be around 300,000.'

'That's quite substantial.'

'Yes, it ensures our safety and acts as insurance against any attack by Hindustan. The US military has operational control in case of war,' Naga explained, braking as the traffic light turned orange.

'Isn't it demeaning for Dravidians?'

'Of course, there's significant opposition, especially from liberal political parties. The anti-American sentiment spiked three years ago after two US soldiers in a tank accidentally killed two teenage girls in Mangalore. But we have no choice; we can't fight the Hindustan army alone.'

'Another form of imperialism by America.'

'As I mentioned earlier, the Soviet Union has more soldiers based in Hindustan. It's all part of Cold War politics, where smaller countries become pawns,' Naga replied. 'On the left ahead is the commercial district of Sepoy Town. It's full of Westernized shopping and nightclubs, but locals avoid it. It can get dangerous at night, being the red-light district frequented by soldiers. That's why I never took you there. We'll head to the right, where there's another commercial area,' he added as the light turned green.

Before long, they arrived at their destination.

'Don't be too late,' Maya said as she stepped out of the car, and Naga nodded, promising to meet her at the entrance of the Safire Multiplex after parking.

The crowd at the booking counters was unusually large for a weekday, reminiscent of weekend showings in Corea. Maya mused on the local enthusiasm for cinema as she observed the towering cutouts of movie posters, all in local languages. Among the featured actors, one stood out with fairer skin.

'That must be Kamalhaasan,' she thought, distinguishing him from the others.

Approaching Naga, she pointed to the poster. 'Is that Kamalhaasan?'

'You're spot on. He stands out, doesn't he?' Naga replied.

'Why are the actresses so... fat?' Maya inquired.

'Here, a plump figure is seen as a sign of health,' Naga explained, then added with a smile, 'but I prefer someone slim like you.'

Maya, shifting the topic, asked, 'Why aren't there any Hollywood movies showing?'

'We have a screen quota system,' Naga said. 'It mandates that local language films be shown for 200 days a year to support our film industry.'

'And has it been beneficial?'

'Absolutely. Dollywood has flourished. Without the quota, we wouldn't have achieved such quality and global appeal. It's a stark contrast to the Hindi film industry, which lacks originality and often glorifies the Nehru dynasty.'

'What if someone wants to watch the latest Hollywood films?'

'No issue there. We have plenty of video-on-demand services that offer them a week after their international release.'

'So, which movie are we watching?' Maya gestured towards the posters.

'The second one up there,' Naga pointed.

'Will I enjoy it?'

'Many foreigners do. But I brought you here to witness the frenzy Rajanikanth inspires.'

'What do you mean?'

Naga directed her attention to a commotion near the entrance gates. Maya watched in disbelief as fans worshipped a Rajanikanth poster, some pouring milk over it, others breaking coconuts, offering garlands and money, and dancing fervently.

'They revere him like a deity,' she realized, astonished.

'Just wait until the film starts,' Naga said, a knowing look in his eyes.

Chandramukhi was unlike any movie Maya had seen before. While the story of the plot was wafer thin, about the ghost of a 100-year-old court dancer and her revenge on the people who killed her, there was a lot of action, drama and music which seemed irrelevant to the main plot. The movie was confusing, more so because many of the actors looked alike to her. The English subtitles did help, but only to a limited extent, the whole cultural mismatch left Maya more confused, but the crowd seemed to love it. Every time Rajanikanth ap-

peared on the screen in multicolored clothes, the people went hysterical, screaming in joy, whistling and throwing money on the screen.

'How did you like the movie?' Naga asked as they drove away from Shanthi multiplex. He had noticed her dozing off many times through the movie, only to wake up with a start to the loud screaming and howling by the audience.

Naga empathized, 'Our films often indulge in excessive drama and tangential subplots. I, too, prefer the succinct storytelling of Hollywood.'

Maya, recalling the vibrant costumes, remarked, 'Does anyone actually dress like that? He resembled a clown from a Pyongyang circus.'

Naga chuckled, 'Rajanikanth's flamboyant style is iconic here. His fashion choices quickly become national trends.'

'He reminds me of Yeong-gu,' she chuckled.

Yeong-gu was a hugely popular slapstick comedy character in Corean cinema, modeled on the lines of Charlie Chaplin.

'Is he a popular actor?'

'Yes, the best comedian we have.'

'Rajanikanth is not a comedian. Remember that dark fellow in the movie who was afraid of ghosts? He is the comedian.'

'Most people in the movie were dark. Anyway, I found Rajanikanth funny.'

'What do you know? I saw you dozing many times,' he replied slightly annoyed.

'Anyone will fall asleep with so many songs.'

'That is the last Tamil movie I am taking you to. I thought it would help you understand the importance of movies, the hysteria they generate and the reason why so many actors become politicians.'

'What do you mean? Hysteria, I saw. The reason they become politicians, I did not.'

'Many of the actors have used movies to build up a reputation and then dived into politics on the strength of the goodwill.This hysteria is linked to their success as politicians. As I told you before, our four Presidents were extremely popular in South India; MGR in Tamil Nadu, NTR in Andhra Pradesh, Raajkumar in Karnataka and now Jayalalitha again from Tamil Nadu. They all acted in roles that helped them in their political careers later. They convinced people that their political values mirrored their film roles.'

'What about Kerala?'

'There was one popular actor from Kerala, Prem Nazir, who tried to join politics, but failed. Malayalam movies are not as popular as Tamil, Telugu or Kannada, so he did not have a nation-wide appeal.'

'Rajanikanth has a nationwide appeal with that silly style?'

'Sure, he will be our next President.'

'From todays movie, I gather that he is just an action hero who fights, sings and dances in clown clothes. How will that help his political career? Don't tell me he will wear those clothes while in office.'

'Unlike the other actors before him, he does not try to portray the image of a sinless God-fearing man. So, there are no ideological hang-ups, but he gives inspiration to the people. There are more than 200,000 fan clubs that engage in numerous social activities. The people love him for his humility.'

'This would never happen anywhere else in the world,' she retorted still confused.

'I am feeling hungry. Where do we go now?'

'I am sorry, I forgot about your early dinnertime. Why don't we order in? Chinese?'

'Sure, I am in no mood to go to a restaurant now, the movie just killed my patience, just hope this traffic gets better.'

•••

'Want a drink while we wait for the food?' Naga greeted Maya as she emerged from her room, clad in a snug blue top and a short skirt. He had opted for comfort in an old T-shirt and shorts.

'Sure, a scotch would be nice,' Maya replied.

Naga's gaze briefly wandered over her smooth, shapely legs. 'Exactly what I had in mind,' he thought, opening a fresh bottle of Glenmorangie, his preferred single malt. As Maya sat, her left leg crossed over the right, revealing a hint of red panties.

'By the way, what's up with your roommate? I meant to ask earlier. You mentioned he'd be back soon,' Naga inquired, trying to divert his attention from Maya's legs.

'Sunder? He'll be back on Thursday. You'll get to meet him before we head to Hyderabad,' Naga replied.

'What does he do?' Maya asked.

'He's a professor of International Relations at Madras University.'

'University? It would have been handy to have him around to dig deeper into Professor Ganapathy,' Maya remarked.

'I know. I tried reaching him on his phone, but no luck. He needs to be on campus for the details,' Naga explained.

'Where is he now?' Maya questioned.

'He's in Colombo, attending a friend's wedding. Let me show you his photo; it should be in my album,' Naga said, heading towards the bookshelf. 'Here he is.'

Maya examined the fair man in the picture—balding with a touch of gray, a defined nose, and a strong jawline. 'He looks quite different from the rest,' she observed.

'Yeah, he's older than me by five years. His family fled from Hindustan,' Naga explained.

'Hindustan?' Maya inquired.

'His grandfather sheltered some Muslims during the riots, got into trouble, and might still be in a camp. His father left out of fear,' Naga elaborated.

'When was that?' Maya asked.

'In 1975—the same year my father vanished,' Naga revealed.

'What do his parents do here?' Maya continued her inquiry.

'They're doing well now. Initially, they struggled and faced discrimination, but they've found acceptance. They run a restaurant serving Hindustani cuisine in the city,' Naga answered, returning to the topic of drinks. 'Ice or soda?'

'Just two ice cubes, please. Can I meet them?' Maya requested.

'We'll wait for Sunder to get back; it'll be more appropriate. Let me mark it on the calendar—July 23rd should work. It's a Friday, and I can leave work early,' Naga suggested.

'What's today's date?' Maya inquired.

'It's the 20th—nine days since you arrived,' Naga replied.

'The 20th already? How could I forget?' Maya's eyes welled up as she quickly downed her scotch. 'Nothing... Can I have another? Neat, this time.'

'Maya, what's the matter?' he asked refilling her glass as she sat in silence, tears streaming down her cheeks. 'I'm such a terrible mother,' she sobbed, extending her glass for more scotch.

Perplexed, Naga refilled her glass and emptied his own, puzzled by Maya's sudden distress.

The doorbell rang, and Naga rose. 'That must be our food. I'll be right back,' he said, glancing back at Maya, who was now crying uncontrollably, her head buried in her hands. Despite feeling a surge of anger at her hidden secrets, he fetched the food and returned to find her still in distress.

'Maya, are you okay?' he asked softly, though his mind was swirling with betrayal.

'No, I'm not,' she replied, sniffing back her tears. 'How could I forget my son's birthday?'

'How old is he?' Naga inquired, his voice hesitant.

'Three years old today.'

'Do you want to call him now?'

'It's too late. I promised to call in the morning, but my parents don't have a phone. He would've been waiting at the neighbor's.'

'What about his father?' Naga questioned.

'I don't know,' Maya admitted.

'You never mentioned being married,' Naga muttered, taking a sip of his scotch, eager to unravel Maya's past.

'That's because I'm not married. We separated two years ago, right after Dong-min was born. He was a jerk, refused to even provide child support. I'm glad he's out of my life.'

'Do you have a photo of your son?' Naga asked.

'Yes, it's on my dressing table. Could you get it for me?' Maya requested, pouring another drink, her face flushed.

Naga retrieved the photo, feeling a mix of curiosity and guilt. He had never invaded Maya's privacy, but now he couldn't resist peeking into her room. The familiar peach scent enveloped him as he observed the disarray, resisting the temptation to delve further.

Returning with the photo, he smiled shyly. 'He looks adorable. So, his name is Dong-min Choi?'

'No, Park Dong-min. In Corea, the child takes the father's family name,' Maya explained, tears welling up again as she gazed at her son.

Naga put his arm around her. 'I understand how you feel. You must miss him terribly.'

'Poor boy must be so lonely. I hate myself for leaving him. Thank you, Naga, for your support,' Maya said, sobbing as she hugged him tightly.

He felt her breath on his neck the sweet peach smell now grew stronger as her smooth hair caressed his cheeks. His shoulder felt damp as she continued sobbing and trembling, holding him tightly.

'He must be all right. Don't worry, you can speak to him tomorrow' he said, unable to control his feelings, as a tear dropped out of his left eye. As it splattered on her forehead, she looked up, and in one swift move pushed her mouth to his. Although taken aback, he couldn't let go of this opportunity and gently sucked on her rosy lips. Their tongues interlocked, his right hand caressed her back, while the left supported her face.

Feeling salty tears on his mouth, he gently licked it clean with his tongue, all the way to her eyelids, before kissing them. Her mouth now moved towards his right earlobe, which she felt with her wet tongue, before giving it a sharp bite. He hardly felt the pain, as his left hand pushed its ways into her skirt and she moaned. It only made him more excited.

With passions on both sides running high, he shifted his position gently, making her lie on her back as he straddled her.

Her mouth still slurping at his, her hands furiously ripped off the buttons on his shirt. With his left hand, he managed to unhook her bra and pulled the top over her shoulder. It was too tight to proceed further. He tried pulling it harder, but her soft wonderful mounds with pink stiff nipples standing erect, mischievously winked. She pushed his head down while her right hand wiggled inside his shorts.

His was still inside her, having managed to slip through the stubborn panty elastic. It kept advancing, like a snake in the grass hunting for its prey, until it touched the soft flesh, dripping with anticipation. However, his clumsy maneuver upset their balance and they rolled down from the sofa onto the floor, with a small thud, hearts thumping wildly.

Luckily for her, she fell on top. They froze for a millisecond, and then continued their game, tugging wildly at what was remaining of their clothes. She aided him, by pulling down her skirt, with her toe. Their naked bodies burned in lust, as they smothered each with more kisses and soft bites. This was the moment. Their juices were now ready to splurge and mix in harmony. Protection was the last thing on their minds.

THE PLOT THICKENS

Thud! Thud! Thud! Thud!

Moon jolted awake. Someone was pounding on the front door, shouting in Tamil. He glanced at his watch; it was already seven, and the morning sun streamed through the window bars, casting a prison-like pattern on the floor.

Thud! Thud! Thud! Thud!

Why is Professor Subbaiah not answering the door?

He painfully got up and tightened the knot of his lungi.

Although Subbaiah had brought his luggage from the hostel, Moon felt comfortable wearing the lungi. It provided for great ventilation in the hot and humid weather. The only irritant was the constant need to tighten the knot so that it did not slip away.

He limped to the living room, and realized that Subbaiah was not home.

More knocking and shouting; the voice was certainly not friendly. In fact, it seemed overtly aggressive.

He peeked through a window in the living room, managing to hide himself behind the curtain. There were a few armed policemen standing a little distance away, while one of them was menacingly banging on the door, pistol in hand.

Moon was frightened and confused.

What is happening? Where is Professor Subbaiah?

'Who is it? Professor is not at home,' he shouted out.

More banging. He peeked out again and noticed Professor Ganapathy standing on the side with his wife and a couple of other neighbors. He was talking to a few policemen.

Relieved, he drew the curtain to a side, coming in plain view. He tried to draw Ganapathy's attention, but when that failed, he shouted out in Corean, 'Shikoro.'

The policeman at the door came to the window and seemed surprised to see him. He said something in Tamil again.

Using body language, Moon told him to wait a moment, while he opened the door.

As soon as he unlatched the door, the policeman pushed him aside and rushed in. He searched all the rooms, before coming out again. By this time Ganapathy had come forward to console Moon.

'Sir, what is happening? Why are the policemen here? I have a student visa,' he quivered.

'Don't worry young man they are not after you. They are searching for Subbaiah. Any idea where he is?'

'No sir, he went out at night saying he had a meeting. I don't think he has come back.'

Ganapathy said something to the policeman, who glared at Moon, got into the rusty jeep and retreated.

'Why are they looking for Professor Subbaiah?'

'They have an arrest warrant for him. The police are taking many people under preventive custody to stop the riots. He has been identified as a troublemaker.'

'Sir, is there a lot of violence?'

'Unimaginable. We didn't get the newspaper today, but I heard on the radio that the whole city is burning. Last night they brought in the army, which only made matters worse. The situation is equally bad in Andhra, Mysore and Kerala.'

'What about the other states? I heard there are more non-Hindi speaking areas.'

'No. They have not joined the protests. I am glad they understand the need to keep India united,' Ganapathy replied. 'Did you have breakfast?'

'No, they woke me up.'

'Fine. You can wash up and come over to my home, Vijaylaxmi can make a few more idlis.'

'Thank you, sir, I will be there in 30 minutes.'

Moon latched the front door, and went into the kitchen. He badly needed some coffee.

Standing near the stove was Subbaiah with a finger to the lips.

'Sir, you are here,' Moon whispered.

'Yes, I hid in the cupboard, they wanted to arrest me.'

'What for?'

'To crush our movement, Anna and Karunanidhi have gone underground, it is time for me to disappear too.'

'What about me?'

'Don't worry. I will return every night and leave before sunrise. Keep the back door unlatched at all times. Just don't tell anyone, not even Ganapathy, I am beginning to suspect his behavior.'

'For how long will this go on?'

'As long as it takes.'

'Moon did you close the front door?' Subbaiah suddenly squealed.

'Yes sir,' Moon replied worried. 'What about my food?'

'It is a good thing I stocked up on noodles. They should last for at least a week. I am sure Vijaylaxmi will take pity on you and invite you to their house often. Be careful, not a word to anyone.'

'They have invited me for breakfast now.'

'Good. Wonder what they are having, I am starving.'

'They said *idli*.'

'Great, you should try smuggling out a few *idlis*. I can have them with *avakaaya*. Be careful, they should not suspect a thing, now hurry up.'

'I urgently need some coffee first.'

'Sorry, I forgot you just woke up. I will make some filter coffee for us.'

•••

'Professor Subbaiah! Your *idlis* are here.'

'Shh, keep your voice down. The neighbors might hear,' Subbaiah whispered, stepping out from a silent bucket-bath. 'Ensure the front door is bolted and the curtains drawn.'

'All taken care of, sir,' Moon replied.

Subbaiah's stomach growled as he took the plastic container from Moon. 'How did you manage this container? Didn't they notice?'

'It's theirs. They gave me extra *idlis* and *chutney* for lunch.'

'Then I'll have to find lunch elsewhere.'

'No need, sir. I'll whip up some noodle soup later.'

'Appreciated. What did Ganapathy say?'

'He seemed concerned about you and asked where you were.'

'And your response?'

'I suggested you might have traveled to Hyderabad to see Madam.'

'Excellent. That'll throw him off. I'll eat and leave soon. The police may return.'

'I'll stay visible on the verandah with a book. It'll allay any suspicions.'

'Clever thinking,' Subbaiah nodded, savoring the *idlis*.

'What's your plan, sir?'

'I must attend meetings and rally more protests. Our concern is the army. Despite their morale after the China conflict, they're disciplined. We can't confront them.'

'Aren't many soldiers from the South?'

'They're about 20 percent of the military. But... they're a majority in the Madras Regiment here.'

'Would they fire on peaceful protestors?'

'They follow orders. If Anna can sway the South Indian officers, it might help. You do have insightful questions!'

'If the army sides with the people, the Prime Minister's hands are tied.'

'True, but there are other regiments. She could deploy them here.'

'That would take time, right?'

'Indeed. I'll discuss this with my party.' Subbaiah rinsed his plate. 'Keep watch while I exit through the back.'

Moon signaled the clear, and Subbaiah, towel over his face, vanished into the day.

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'Young man, any news about Subbaiah?' Ganapathy called out to Moon who had dozed off on the patio chair, a book on his tummy.

'No sir,' he said rubbing his eyes and glancing at his watch. It was 4 pm. 'There is no telephone here, he may call you.'

'Oh right, I forgot. What are you reading?' he said pulling a chair next to him.

'The Discovery of India,' Moon said, handing him the book.

'Very good choice, it was written by our first Prime Minister while he was imprisoned during our freedom movement, it is a classic.'

'There are too many pages, and I am easily confused by all the names.'

'Don't worry, read it carefully and you will understand our history, philosophy and culture, you will realize that we are all one race with common roots.'

'Pakistanis and Indians also must be the same race, but they are different countries now.'

'That is because of the divide and conquer policy of the British.'

'Your Prime Minister appears to be following the same policy now. India may be divided again.'

'That will not happen, the army is already here, I heard thousands of people have been arrested.'

'How many have been killed so far?'

'Only around 300.'

'Only? Sir you are saying it as if more should be killed.'

'If more are killed it will stop this nonsense.'

'They are innocent people.'

'Who told them to go out on the streets and protest? They are rowdies, burning public property and spreading fear. Do you have any idea of the economic loss to India?Everything has come to a standstill, factories, schools, colleges, offices, transport. Many daily wage earners may be starving.'

'Shouldn't you be blaming the government for this situation?'

'No, I blame Anna and his party. Even sensible people like Subbaiah have been trapped by their rhetoric. The government is not stopping economic activity. The January agitation cost us almost 5 percent of our domestic product. This time it will be more, if the army does not stop them. We are a poor country and cannot afford it at this stage of our development.'

'The same logic could have been extended to Gandhi's protests against the British or our fight against the Japanese. I think these agitations are justified.'

'There is a fundamental difference between freedom fighters and anarchists. I am not against protests, as long as they are peaceful.'

'I was at Marina Beach for the first meeting which began as a peaceful movement, it was the unprovoked police firing that killed many innocent people.'

'That is not what I heard. Many protestors attacked the police first.'

'I was there sir. Nothing of that sort happened.'

'Did you see the police firing first?'

'No, I got caught in the stampede, but I heard it.'

'How can you be sure that they were not attacked first?'

'Professor Subbaiah told me so, and the newspaper reports also mentioned it.'

'Newspaper reports, *The Hindu*, eh? Don't believe everything in that newspaper. They have their own agenda.'

'What agenda?'

'I do not know for sure, but I heard that they are giving financial support to Anna's party. It is some kind of an understanding they have. If DMK comes to power, they plan to diversify into other business areas. The traitors, siding with an anti-Brahmin party.'

'Why do you call them traitors? They may be supporting a cause they believe in? I heard the newspaper played a crucial role in India's freedom struggle.'

'That is right, but they have now lost their way. Do you know that the family, which owns The Hindu, is Iyengar? How dare they support a political party which wants to drive out Brahmins from Madras?'

'I believe this fight is against Hindi and not Brahmins.'

'No, you are mistaken. Hindi is just an excuse, and DMK's political agenda is still driven by anti-Brahmanism.'

A sudden shout from Vijaylaxmi interrupted their conversation. 'There is phone call for you from Inspector Balasubramanium.'

'Wonder what he wants?' Ganapathy said with a frown, his eyelids twittering.

He does look embarrassed, maybe he is a police informer as Professor Subbaiah suspected.

'Isn't he the same inspector who contacted you when I was injured?

'Yes, he is my school friend, we grew up together, and our families are very close. It may have something to do with his sister's wedding next month.'

Lies. Damn lies.

'I guess I will try reading *Discovery of India* without falling asleep.'

'Yes, you do that. I will check on you later in the evening.'

•••

The nine o'clock BBC news offered few new developments on the situation.

Curfew had imposed in the cities of Madras, Hyderabad and Bangalore. The smaller towns and cities in the region were also tense with sporadic violence...

Many policemen, are disobeying direct orders from their senior offices, and joining the rioters...

The Indian army continues to be the only reliable force that can control the situation...

After burning government buildings and transport, some of the protestors are now targeting North Indian residential areas in Sowcarpet and shops...

Moon was keenly listening to the news in the living room, slurping on his noodle soup, having just woken up from a deep slumber, when he heard a faint knock on the door.

Must be Professor Ganapathy.

He opened the door and peeped out at the dark empty verandah, a couple of gunshots rang out in a distance, and he closed it shut immediately.

The knocking persisted; it was coming from the back. He switched on the kitchen lights to investigate, when a sharp voice startled him.

'Switch off the lights and open the backdoor.'

It was Professor Subbaiah. He seemed furious.

'Didn't I tell you to keep the back door open at all times?' he barked at Moon, as the door was unlatched.

'I am sorry sir, I forgot.'

Subbaiah was not alone. Two other stocky dark-skinned men trooped in behind him, their face wrapped in towels. They sat down on the kitchen floor, and revealed their weather-beaten faces with bushy mustaches. They appeared to be in their mid-forties. Subbaiah handed them a tumbler of drinking water from the clay pot.

'They are my party members, and will stay with us tonight,' he told Moon. 'Please switch off all the lights in the house, we need complete darkness.'

As the entire house dissolved into the night, Subbaiah guided the other two to the living room towards the sofa, their eyesight slowly adjusting to the darkness, while Moon stood in a corner of the room.

'Sir, I heard there was more violence today,' he said in a low voice.

'The situation is out of control now. Many policemen have joined our movement, Anna is secretly meeting some Army officers tonight' Subbaiah whispered.

'BBC said that North Indians are being targeted in Madras.'

'Yes, it is very unfortunate. My party is divided; one group wants to target Brahmins and North Indians. But I am totally opposed to it, as is Anna; our fight is against the government, not fellow citizens.'

'Why doesn't Anna make an announcement and stop it.'

'He cannot come out in the open; there is a warrant for him, and the moment he is spotted, he will be arrested. Luckily, the City Police Commissioner is a friend and alerted us, so he was able to go underground. If it gets worse, he may have to relocate to Ceylone for a few weeks.'

'Are the police helping you?'

'Yes, they have refused orders to fire on other Tamilians. We are now directly in combat with the Indian army. These two young men are from Andhra and Mysore, they reported that a similar situation is unfolding in their states.' he replied. 'Moon if you don't mind, can you wash some rice? We haven't had dinner, and can have some curd rice with avakaaya.'

'I don't know how to make this rice, in Corea we eat a different kind of sticky rice.'

'Don't worry just wash three cups of rice in water. I will take care of the rest.'

'I can do that,' Moon said, heading to the kitchen, as Subbaiah plunged into a discussion with the visitors.

When he came out a few minutes later, Moon noticed them pouring over a map in candlelight. It appeared to be a map of India, with lots of scribbling and markings. He could not understand their conversation, which was interspersed with a few familiar words: army, barracks, grenades, and rifles.

Not wanting to disturb their flow, Moon sat down on a corner chair and watched.

They were getting quite animated now, and frequently raised their voices. After 20 minutes of heated discussion, Subbaiah folded the map and turned towards Moon.

'We will show them!'

A sudden loud knock on the door made everyone gasp.

'Young man! Are you awake?'

'It is Ganapathy,' Subbaiah whispered, as he motioned the other two to follow him into the bedroom. 'Don't allow him inside.'

A few more knocks later, Moon slowly unlatched the front door, while Subbaiah and his friends safely locked themselves in the bedroom.

'Is everything okay with you? Why have you switched off your lights? I heard some voices.'

'That was the radio sir. I was listening to BBC News.'

'In candlelight?' Gananpathy asked suspiciously, poking his head through the open gap in the door.

'Oh that? I was not able to sleep, so decided to meditate for some time, it is a very effective remedy in my country.'

'I thought I heard Subbaiah's voice.'

'He is in Hyderabad sir. How can it be possible?'

'Anyway, Vijaylaxmi, told me to remind you of breakfast at my house tomorrow, she is very worried about your food. Did you have dinner?'

'Yes, I made some noodle soup.'

'Poor boy, why don't you shift to my house till Subbaiah returns? You may be lonely and hungry all by yourself.'

'No sir, it is OK, I am able to do a lot of reading. It is good for me.'

'Suit yourself, if you have any problems just come next door. Don't forget breakfast at 8.30 tomorrow morning. Vijaylaxmi is making *upama*.'

'Thank you, sir, I will be there.'

He waited until he saw Ganapathy enter his own compound, before latching the front door once again.

'What did he want?' Subbaiah asked, coming out of his bedroom.

'He invited me for breakfast tomorrow.'

'I suspect, it is not the only thing that was on his mind, he was definitely snooping around. We have to be very careful, as he will definitely inform the police.'

'That reminds sir, he had a phone call from an inspector in the afternoon while he was chatting with me here.'

'Inspector Bala?'

'Yes, the inspector who helped you find me after the stampede. Is he Professor Ganapathy's childhood friend?'

'Is that what he told you? Of course not, he has been very secretive about this association even before,' he replied. 'Why don't you go and sleep? I will make rice for us, and we have more work to do. We will leave at dawn, remember to keep the backdoor unlocked.'

•••

When Moon woke up the next morning, all the three had disappeared. First things first, he had to make some coffee. He had observed Subbaiah making filter coffee, and memorized the Indian technique. He limped towards the backdoor which was unlatched. A few minutes later, cup of coffee in hand he opened the front door, allowing the fresh morning air to rush indoors and drive the stale smell away. No newspaper today either.

He went back indoors, with the door still open and switched on the radio, just in time for the morning news.

American President Lyndon Johnson has kicked off a broad-based review of the country's involvement in the Vietnam conflict...

With 75,000 American troops already stationed in South Vietnam, the President is weighing the options of either increasing combat strength or pulling out completely...

There are reports that USSR and Communist China have sent troops to help defend the northern reaches of North Vietnam...

In another interesting development, there is more trouble in the Asian region.

In the southern cities across India, the agitation against imposition of Hindi has intensified...

Following the lead of the police force, a section of the Indian Army appears to be sympathetic to their cause...

At midnight yesterday, a 200-strong crowd went on a rampage completely destroying a residential colony of North Indians in Sowcarpet. According to our correspondent, army soldiers present at the site refused

to intervene and let the attacking crowd go. At least 12 North Indians have been burnt alive...

The top leadership of Dravida Munnetra Kazagham, Swatantara Party and the Communist Party of India, the main organizational force behind this agitation has gone underground...Additional army troops have been sanctioned, and will be reaching the affected cities by tomorrow afternoon...

The agitation was getting messier.

A sudden roaring noise alerted Moon, it sounded like a vehicle. He went out to the verandah, cup of coffee in hand. He was right, it was a police jeep.

The vehicle went right up to Ganapathy's house and the same inspector who had woken him the previous day stepped down, walked up to the house, glanced sideways at Moon and knocked on the door in front.

Ganapathy emerged smiling, they shook hands and went inside, carefully closing the door behind them as two constables came out of the jeep and stood watch.

Moon wanted to wait, but the coffee starting working on him and he had to rush back inside, clutching tightly at his lungi.

By the time he came out ten minutes later, relief showing on his face, the jeep had disappeared.

He decided to dig deeper during breakfast, but unfortunately, could not elicit any more details. Ganapathy avoided the subject and instead discussed the Vietnam War and its fall out in the Southeast Asian region.

'So, Moon, what is your reading of the situation? Do you think America will send more forces and defeat the North?' Ganapathy asked, munching on a mouthful of *upama*.

'I have not been following the Vietnam War sir, I am more worried about the situation here,' Moon replied.

'Young man, keep an open mind, you have to be aware of world developments. Listen to the radio and suck up information, it will help you sooner than later.'

'I will try, but right now I just want the agitation here to end, so that I can go back to my own country.'

'By the way, I just got a phone call from Subbaiah. You were right; he is in Hyderabad to organize the demonstrations there. He was inquiring about you.'

THE MORNING AFTER

The alarm's shrill tone roused Naga, his head throbbing from last night's excesses. Normally, he'd indulge in a few more moments of sleep, but today was different. Beside him lay Maya, her bare skin a gentle contrast to the tangled sheets. He admired her peaceful expression, her lips curled into a soft smile.

She's even more radiant in the morning light.

Naga lay there, the weight of their intimacy heavy on his mind. He wasn't the same man as yesterday; Maya had guided him through his first time with a tenderness he hadn't expected. Yet, guilt gnawed at him.

Did I overstep? I should apologize.

With effort, he left the warmth of the bed, donned some shorts, and escaped to the living room. The aftermath of their night was evident—dinner untouched, clothes scattered, and empty bottles a testament to their indulgence.

He set about tidying up, craving the clarity that only coffee could provide. The newspaper's headlines blurred before his eyes, prompting him to seek solace in the fresh morning breeze. As he pondered his next words, Maya's voice broke his reverie.

'Good morning,' she greeted, now dressed in casual attire.

'Morning,' he replied, avoiding her gaze.

'You look unwell.'

'It's a hangover. I'm sorry if I... last night wasn't right,' he confessed, his back to her.

'No need for apologies. Last night was comforting,' she assured him, a single tear escaping her eye.

Naga turned, his heart swelling with relief and concern. He embraced her, their connection deepening beyond physicality. 'We should call your son, as planned.'

'Yes. I'll get ready,' she said.

'Take your time. I'll stay home today; this headache is too much.'

'I know just the thing—*haejangguk*.'

'*Haejangguk*?'

'A Corean remedy, a pork soup for hangovers. It's restorative.'

'Could you make it? I'll get the pork.'

'We need specific spices, and it takes time.'

'Let's visit Corea Town then. They'll have *haejangguk*, and we can shop for spices. I tasted different Corean meat and soup last night.'

'Naga! Don't be naughty,' she said give him a gentle punch. 'That is a good idea, I can also buy kimchi and some spices.'

'That's settled then, we make your phone call, and then go to Corea Town for brunch and shopping. On the way back I will drop you off at the University for your meeting with the old man.'

•••

'It is amazing, my hangover's gone,' Naga said, as he pulled out of the parking lot of Yeongyang Center in Corea Town.

'I told you so. Haejangguk has some amazing powers. Thanks for getting me here, I was finally able to taste kimchi.'

'Maya, I have a confession make. I was afraid of the kimchi smell, which is why I delayed getting you to Corea Town.'

'What's wrong with the smell? It seems OK to me.'

'Frankly, it stinks like sweaty feet,' he replied, honking at the car ahead that was refusing to let him overtake.

'Naga, it is insulting, you know it is our traditional food. Moreover, please don't generalize. There are more than 180 varieties of kimchi. What we had today in the restaurant was fermented for more than a year, which is why the smell was strong.'

'180 varieties? I didn't know they had so many types of kimchi.'

'Kimchi varieties are determined by the main vegetable ingredients and the mix of seasonings used to flavor it. Anyway, since you mentioned it, I must warn you that I will keep my kimchi in your refrigerator, so don't complain.'

Oh shit!

'No problem, I will get used to it.'

'Naga can you hurry up, I do not want to be late for the meeting with Professor Ganapathy.'

'There are CCTVs everywhere monitoring the speed of vehicles. We will reach on time, don't worry, the expressway will be empty this time of the day.'

•••

Professor Ganapathy was waiting for Maya on the same bench he had left her the previous day. He was in a bad mood. Throughout his career, he had laid emphasis on punctuality, reminding his students that it shows respect for other people and their time, and expected others to return the courtesy. Maya's delay was a breach of that value.

An unexpected traffic jam had caught Naga unawares, and it took an hour to cross the last milestone. As soon as his car screeched to a halt, Maya jumped out and ran towards the university gates. Naga had switched on her pen-recorder and put it in her purse. 'Don't forget to leave your purse slightly open, and speak loudly,' he reminded her.

Approaching the bench, she noticed Ganapathy scowling.

Ganapathy's frown deepened as she approached. 'I'm sorry, sir. The traffic from Corea Town was unexpected.'

'An appointment is an appointment,' he chided. 'Don't let it happen again.'

Maya nodded. 'I understand. Although the traffic wasn't my fault, I promise it won't happen again.'

'How did you find Corea Town? Did it remind you of home?' Ganapathy asked.

'It made me a little homesick. I could speak Corean after a long time and finally taste *kimchi*,' Maya replied.

'*Kimchi*...yes, I remember. I developed a taste for it during my time in Seoul. As Subbaiah used to say, it's like a magnet that zaps you and holds on.'

'Did you enjoy your time in Seoul?'

'I had only three problems: weather, language, and identifying people.'

'What do you mean by identifying people?' Maya asked, puzzled.

'I got easily confused between the Chinese, Coreans, and Japanese.'

'I too struggle to differentiate between Dravidians, Hindustanis, and Pakistanis. It can be confusing.'

'I guess you're right. We're all part of the same race. Seriously, how do you identify if someone is Chinese or Japanese?'

'There are no fixed rules; we just see people and can tell them apart. Most Chinese have rounder faces, Japanese have angular faces, while Coreans have a mix of the two. We're also taller,' Maya explained. 'Sir, can you tell me more about your time in Seoul?'

'Oh yes, I taught there for a year in 1975. I was invited as an exchange professor to teach economics at Seoul National University. You may not have been born then.'

'I take that as a compliment. I am much older than you think.'

'I won't ask your age. As they say, never ask a woman her age and a man his salary.'

'Where did you stay? On campus?'

'No, I stayed with a friend near the university.'

'A Corean friend?'

'No, a Dravidian friend. He was my colleague at Madras University and came on an exchange program to teach in Seoul,' Ganapathy said, gazing at the clouds.

'What was his name?'

Ganapathy met her eyes. 'Venkat. His full name was Venkataramaiah.'

'Meeting him would have been beneficial for your research, but unfortunately, he's no longer with us,' Ganapathy said with a hint of sadness.

'I'm sorry to hear that,' Maya replied, shifting the conversation. 'How did you find the Corean students?'

'They were bright and diligent, though my accent posed a challenge for them,' he reminisced.

'My father faced similar challenges here. He often speaks fondly of his time as a student,' Maya shared.

'Your father was at Madras University? What did he study?'

'He studied economics in 1965 but had to leave due to the civil war. He finished his studies in Kyoto.'

Ganapathy's eyes widened. 'You're Moon's daughter?'

'Yes, my father is Choi Moon-kyu.'

'Remarkable! I remember Moon well; he was inquisitive, much like you.'

Maya nodded. 'I've heard Subbaiah was active during the civil war.'

'Call him Professor Subbaiah, young lady. Yes, he was one of the front leaders and organized students, not just in Madras but also in Andhra. You didn't tell me, what is Moon doing now?'

'He teaches at Pyongyang Institute of Development Studies. My mother is also a professor there.'

'Love marriage, eh?'

'Yes, they met during their Ph.D. studies at Kyoto University.'

'Is she Japanese by any chance?'

'Yes, sir. She's from Osaka.'

'What an irony—he disliked Japanese and Chinese here at the university and never mixed with them. But that explains your looks. Sharp features, more like Japanese, yet taller. I've heard Corean women are beautiful and Japanese men handsome. Is it true?'

'That's what they say,' Maya replied. 'Can you tell me more about Professor Subbaiah?'

'Why do you want to know?'

'I'm curious about how my father spent his time in Madras during the agitation.'

'He mostly stayed indoors, alone in Subbaiah's house, eating noodle soup and reading *Discovery of India*, which he never completed. Subbaiah was underground; there was an arrest warrant for him, and his wife was away in Hyderabad. Poor Moon came to our home for breakfast every day. We'd pack extra for him to take home. Later, he had all his meals at our place.'

'Did you join the agitation?'

'I don't believe in violence. Initially, I feared they were against not just Hindi but also Brahmins.'

'Were the Brahmins targeted?'

'Verbally during the first phase of the war, but later, we had no problems. Anna and our first President, MGR, ensured equal treatment for Brahmins. If Karunanidhi had become President, who knows what would have happened.'

'Isn't Anna the father of your nation?' Maya asked.

'Yes, he was a great man, compassionate toward everyone. From the beginning, he opposed violence, but his deputy, Karunanidhi, pushed for it.'

'Why didn't Anna become the first President?'

'He shunned power, much like Mahatma Gandhi. Unfortunately, he died of a heart attack soon after independence. Karunanidhi served as interim President after the war.'

'But I thought MGR was your first President.'

'MGR was the first elected President. After independence, an interim government governed until our Constitution was drafted. Our first elections were in November 1970, and the elected President took office in January 1971.'

'What happened to Karunanidhi? Why didn't he become President?'

'He lost to MGR in the primaries. We followed the American electoral model with direct elections. Every party holds primaries to select their candidate. Karunanidhi stood against MGR and lost.'

'And what is he doing now?'

Ganapathy sighed. 'You ask so many questions. Does it run in your entire family?'

'Sorry, sir. It helps me understand the country and aids my research.'

'Fine. Karunanidhi retired from politics after his defeat. He focused on writing movie scripts and books. He's old now but remains influential. Everyone in the party consults him before making decisions.'

'Did Professor Subbaiah play an important role in the government?'

'He would have been Dravida's first Finance Minister, but they didn't allow him.'

'Who didn't allow him?'

'The MGR faction in the party opposed him. Subbaiah supported Karunanidhi after the war and was even a member of the Constitution drafting committee.'

'You mean Naga's dad drafted your Constitution?'

'Who is Naga?' Ganapathy raised an eyebrow.

'Nagabhushan, that *Hindu* reporter is Subbaiah's son? Why didn't you say so?' Ganapathy exclaimed.

'You told me not to involve him in our meeting,' Maya reminded him.

'Because he's a reporter and asks too many questions. I didn't know he's my best friend's son. I saw him when he was a baby.'

'He's curious about his father's whereabouts. He doesn't believe Professor Subbaiah defected to Hindustan.'

'That's a long story.'

'Do you know what happened to him?'

'Forty years ago...times have changed. I'd like to meet Subbaiah's son tomorrow. I hope his mother is doing well; she made excellent *sambar*!'

'I'll ask him. Actually, he'll come to pick me up, and he might already be at the entrance. You can meet him now.'

'No, no, not today. I have another appointment and must leave now.'

'Thank you, sir. I'll meet you with Naga tomorrow.'

Ganapathy walked away briskly, tapping his walking stick on the pavement. Maya switched off the pen-recorder and headed toward the university entrance gates.

As she approached, she saw Naga's car and ran toward it. He was nodding to music playing on the stereo. She opened the car door, slid into the front seat, and planted a passionate kiss on his lips.

Taken aback, Naga blushed. 'You seem very happy.'

'Of course,' Maya replied, placing her hand on his lap. 'You have no idea what information I've got for you.'

'About my father?'

'Yes. Listen to the recording. Professor Ganapathy wants to meet you tomorrow and share more information.'

'He knows about me?'

'I told him. He also gave me details about my father from their exchange program.'

'Wow, great detective work.'

'You know how to repay me,' she winked.

'I hope you recorded the whole conversation. Let's go home and listen to it,' Naga said, blushing.

•••

Naga played the recording over and over again on his audio system, reclining on the sofa and scribbling notes on a pad, while Maya leaned her head against his shoulder, gently caressing his thighs.

'Maya, please stop,' he pleaded.

'Promise me my reward,' she teased.

'Okay, I promise,' he said, resisting the urge to kiss her. 'You did a great job.'

Maya remained focused. 'There are missing links. He wasn't entirely truthful.'

'What do you mean?'

'He claimed he went to Seoul in 1975—the same year my father disappeared. We need to verify that. Also, we must find his Indian colleague, Venkatramaiah. And he said my father supported Karunanidhi, but Dad's diary shows he backed MGR.'

'Should I email my professor in Corea about the exchange program?'

'Yes, he'll have details. I'll question Ganapathy tomorrow. He's hiding something.'

As they spoke, the doorbell rang. Naga glanced at the clock—it was 8 PM.

'Did you order food?' Maya asked.

'No, but let's see who it is.' Naga opened the door. 'Sunder! You're early.'

'Surprise!' Sunder grinned, dragging his luggage. 'Your Corean friend here?'

'Sunder, meet Maya. Maya, Sunder my roommate,' Naga introduced them.

'So how are you finding Madras? The last time Naga called, he said that your research has been progressing well.'

'Yes, it has, but I think we need your help to resolve some other issues.'

'You mean Professor Ganapathy?'

'There is more,' Naga interrupted, 'why don't you take a shower and relax, you look pretty tired.'

'Yes, it was a tiring trip; my flight was delayed because of a bomb hoax. Did you guys have dinner?'

'No, we were just about to order. You want any?'

'I have a better idea, why don't we drive down to my family restaurant. It's my dad's birthday, one reason I came early.'

'It will be a good opportunity for Maya to meet them. She was curious about life in Hindustan.'

'Fine, let me just freshen up. I will call them and ask them to get dinner for three ready. By the way, I have to warn you Maya, my dad talks a lot, you may be bored to death.'

'That is fine with me, the more he talks the merrier.'

'I will brief you in the car,' Naga said.

•••

Taj Mahal was one of the finest North Indian restaurants in Madras. Situated in a glitzy corner of Triplicane, the mouthwatering vegetarian cuisine was cooked by Hindustani defectors. With a seating capacity of 40, it was not big by commercial standards, but the authentic Hindustani food drew huge crowd every day, mostly expatriates and tourists, but also the occasional Dravidian families who wanted a break from curd rice and *sambar*.

It was a good thing that Sunder alerted his parents. As soon as they arrived, they were ushered to their table, much to the envy of the long line of onlookers who had been waiting for close to 30 minutes.

'My parents will be here soon; we can have some fresh juice.'

'Don't they serve wine here? I could do with some white wine and meat.'

'I'm sorry Maya, my parents are strict Brahmins and do not condone alcohol. This restaurant only serves vegetarian dishes cooked in the authentic Awadhi style.'

'Awadhi cusine is from the city of Lucknow, which is the capital of his parents' province, Uttar Pradesh in Hindustan. Although the non-vegetarian dishes are more popular, the vegetarian food is equally delicious,' Naga added.

'Here he comes,' Sunder got up from his seat, and touched the feet of an old man who was approaching their table. His head was shaven, except for a tiny ponytail that reached his shoulders, and was wearing a dhoti and kurta.

'That is his dad, it is a Hindustani custom to touch the feet of elders as a mark of respect.'

Bringing him to their table, Sunder introduced Maya.

'Hello uncle, how is business? How is aunty's health?' Naga asked.

'Everything is fine, by the grace of God. Aunty had to visit a friend's house, they just had a granddaughter,' Vinay responded, then turning to Maya he continued,' I heard you are here for some research.'

'Yes uncle, I came 10 days ago.'

'How long will you be here?'

'I initially planned for a month, but may stay longer if my work is not finished.'

'Naga, you should take her to other provinces, she should experience the different cultures here. I remember my roommate in University was from Corea, poor chap could not see any other province and had to leave within a month.'

'Why, what happened?' Naga asked.

'The civil war broke out,' he said staring into Maya's eyes. 'I know all Coreans look alike to us, but your friend does have some resemblance with my former roommate.'

'*Pitaji*, we are all very hungry,' Sunder said.

'Sure. Your mother has already chosen the menu for our dinner, it should be ready by now. Why don't you talk to Manager Abhay?'

As Sunder got up to go to talk to the manager, Maya asked, 'Was there a lot of violence in your city during the war?'

'No, not much, it is in the heartland of Hindustan. The violence was mainly in the four provinces in Dravida.'

'Then why did your Corean roommate leave?

'It was here in Madras. I studied at Madras University, but had to return home because of the war. I later completed my degree in Delhi, now renamed Delhi.'

'So you are speaking about your hostel roommate at Madras University in 1965?'

'Absolutely. He asked a lot of questions and kept arguing with me. The strange thing is, he was my roommate but hardly slept in the room, and disappeared every night only to reappear in the morning. I could not get to know him better, and by the time we were getting friendly, the war broke out.'

'Was your roommate's name Choi Moon-kyu by any chance?'

'No, I don't think so; it was Moon Kim or something like that. We used to call him Moon.'

'That's the same. He was my father. He mentioned to me that his roommate was from North India,' she said, without revealing that he also told her that he was an obnoxious racist.

'Jai Shri Ram. Unbelievable. I am meeting my roommate's daughter after 40 years. Glad that he escaped back home. What is he doing now?'

'He teaches economics in Corea.'

'So, he ended up well.'

Sunder returned with the manager, who promised to get dinner started in a few minutes, as the waiters started laying the table. It was difficult to carry on further conversation, what with the constant interruptions, so Vinay started catching up on Sunder's life and activities. The father-son talk soon veered to the familiar topic of marriage, which only seemed to infuriate Sunder, but he kept quite mumbling his protests.

'His parents want him to marry another defectors daughter, a Hindustani Brahmin, but Sunder's girlfriend is a Goa Christian,' Naga whispered to Maya.

'What is a Goa Christian, is it another sect like the ones Ruby and Mathew belong to?'

'No, Goa is part of Karnataka province, it used to be a separate region ruled by the Portugese from 1510 to 1961, when it was annexed by the Indian army. After the civil war, it became a part of Dravida. His girlfriend is catholic.'

'Why are his parents against Sunder's girlfriend?'

'They are conservative Brahmins and do not want any relationship with a Christian family. They believe that Christians are impure because they eat beef and drink wine.'

'My father had mentioned that his roommate was a racist and hated Dravidians for their dark skin. Isn't it ironic that he had to escape to Dravida for a better life?' she muttered under her breath.

'It is, why don't you ask him why he came here? Let us see what he says. By the way, Sunder is the complete opposite of his father and is very liberal in his views.'

As the waiters left the table, Maya looked at the spread in front of her. The food looked delicious and the spices smell was exotic. However, as Sunder started rattling off the names she was confused: *Navratan Korma, Arbi ke Kebab, Rajma Galoti Kebab, Tehri, Naan, Lachha Paratha, Rumali Roti*... the list seemed endless, and she decided to observe Naga to follow his eating etiquette.

'Uncle, when did you come to Dravida?'

'I came here in March 1975, when Sunder was just a kid. As you probably know, my father got into trouble with the authorities because some Muslim peasants hid in our house during the riots.'

'Naga told me that he protected them from a Hindu mob which attacked their houses.'

'That is not entirely true. We did not even know that they were hiding in our house, someone saw them climb the walls and informed the police. We tried to reason with the authorities, but the officer in charge wanted money, which my father refused to pay, so he was hauled to prison.'

'What was the harm if Muslims were hiding in your house? Their life was in danger,' Maya asked.

'That is not what the government tolerates. Minorities are considered non grata, Muslims are considered as Pakistani agents and Christians as Dravidian agents.'

'I hear there are around 110 million Muslims and 15 million Christians in Hindustan. Why don't they all join together and fight for their rights?'

'Maya, it is not very easy. Hindustan is a totalitarian state. I fully backed Indira when she became the Prime Minister, but after the civil war, she became increasingly insecure. She did not tolerate any dissent, and her political opponents were all sent to prison. Many innocent people like my father were caught in the cross-fire.'

'Do you think the situation has changed, now that she is dead?'

'No, it will only get worse. Her younger son who became the President is even more insecure. The only way of retaining power is through creating fear in the minds of people and reminding them of some imaginary foreign hand. It helps that Pakistan and Dravida, the two biggest enemies are neighbors on either side.'

'Don't you think if Hindustan had followed Dravida's example and become a true democracy it could have developed?'

'I do believe it now, having lived here for so many years.'

'What about the personality cult in Hindustan?'

'I support the Nehru family, and find no harm in it, but dynastic politics should be followed only in a true democracy. If the people truly want the dynasty to stay in power, no one can object. The situation is different now, and the people have no say. It is the military which is the most powerful government organization.'

Sunder's father was not as obnoxious as her father had told her. Maybe reality had put him back on track, she thought, as the conversation continued for more than an hour longer.

Although she found it hard to believe many of the stories of atrocities narrated by Sunder's father, she knew they weren't mere fabrications.

OUT OF CONTROL

The breakfast was delicious as usual, but Moon came back with no new information, besides the fact that Subbaiah had called up, pretending to be in Hyderabad. There were no leads as to why the inspector had visited Ganapathy's house.

He placed the container with the extra upama that Vijaylaxmi had packed for his lunch in the kitchen, and switched on the radio. Grabbing the *Discovery of India* from his room, he went to the verandah to relax.

Moon flipped through the book and reached page 61, which he had bookmarked earlier by folding a corner of the page. Ten minutes later, he felt his eyelids growing heavy.

Damn, why do I fall asleep whenever I read this book?

He sat up in his chair and decided to start reading all over again. This time he decided to read aloud.

> *The diversity of India is tremendous; it lies on the surface and anybody can see it. It concerns itself with physical appearances as well as with certain mental habits and traits. There is little in common, to outward seeming, to Pathan of the North-West and Tamil in the far South. Their racial stocks are not the same; though there may be common strands running through them; they differ in face and figure, food and clothing, and of course language...*

Suddenly, a commotion interrupted his reading. Four men approached Ganapathy's house, their partially naked bodies adorned only with white cloth wrapped around their waists. Each wore a thread across their shoulders, reminiscent of Vinay's attire. Their heated Tamil argument filled the air.

Brahmins, Moon noted.

One of the men knocked on Ganapathy's door. As Ganapathy emerged, he faced a barrage of abuse. The men scolded him, even raising their fists in threat. Vijaylaxmi tried to calm them, but their anger persisted. After intense shouting and cursing, they abruptly turned and left.

Moon stood on the porch, ready to intervene if needed. His foreign status didn't matter; his presence could offer some support to Ganapathy.

Vijaylaxmi sobbed, while Ganapathy tried to console her.

As the visitors disappeared around the corner, Moon approached their house.

'Sir, is everything all right?' 'Moon, I'm glad you're here.'

'Who were those men?'

'They're priests from the Kapaleeshwarar Temple in Mylapore. They warned me not to support Anna's party and threatened excommunication.'

'But you don't support Anna. Why the warning?'

'Sit down, Moon,' Ganapathy gestured to a chair, while Vijaylaxmi retreated inside, wiping her tears.

'I have something important to tell you.'

Confused, Moon sat, and Ganapathy continued.

'Anna's party began as an anti-Brahmin movement. But recent developments have shifted their strategy. They no longer oppose Tamil Brahmins; instead, they want everyone to support their cause against Hindi imposition.'

'So all Brahmins are backing Anna? Why did the Temple Trustees threaten you?'

'It's not that simple. Educated Brahmins lean toward supporting Anna, but government loyalists convinced powerful priests that our community would be expelled if Anna's party successfully repealed English. With Inspector Bala's help, I'm forming a Brahmin association to support Anna.'

'Why this sudden change?'

'The violence shocked us. Innocent people in the southern states are dying. Even the police and army units sent here have joined Anna's movement, refusing to fire at their own citizens. Fresh units from North Indian regiments are on their way. We must consolidate our position. I wanted to coordinate with Subbaiah, but he's in Hyderabad. I couldn't discuss this over the phone; the government might be spying.'

Moon wondered: Was this a ruse to extract more information from him?

'Sir, what do you want to discuss with Professor Subbaiah when he returns?'

'There are many people from our community in the government who want to support Anna if we can assure them of victory. I want to strategize mass de-

fections. If the executive branch aligns with Anna and the armed forces, Indira will be powerless. The local media is also on our side, and we hope the judiciary joins.'

'What about the state legislators?'

'The Congress Party holds a majority in the state, and national assembly members don't want to lose power. That's why Anna focuses on other crucial pillars of our democracy.'

'Will you actively join the movement now?'

'Vijaylaxmi opposes it, but I'm trying to convince her. Religion is vital to her, and she fears our family's excommunication.'

'What happens if you're excommunicated from Hinduism?'

'Hinduism isn't monolithic; excommunication doesn't expel us entirely. However, we'd lose our caste status. As Brahmins, caste matters—otherwise, we'd be considered untouchables. The Temple Trustees warned that no repentance would be accepted.'

'So, you couldn't visit temples or interact with other Brahmins. Does it matter?'

'It's the worst fate for a Brahmin. We're custodians of dharma. Our subsect, Deekshitar Iyers, descends from sages who performed tapas in Kailasam. Nearly wiped out in the 14th century, we won't let history repeat.'

'Your sect was destroyed and has risen again?'

'In 1312, a civil war forced many priests to compromise. Some jumped from pagodas, others fled to Kerala. It's deeply emotional for us.'

'What will you do?'

'I'm agnostic, but Vijaylaxmi is devout. She doesn't know I eat non-vegetarian food. It's time to stand up for my beliefs.'

The telephone rang, but hearing Vijaylaxmi answer it, Ganapathy sat back down.

Her voice echoed from inside: '*Anna* is calling from Delhi; he has something important to tell you.'

'*Anna*?' Moon asked.

'Her brother Damodaran. *Anna* means elder brother in Tamil,' Ganapathy replied, heading indoors.

Sitting on the patio, Moon sensed the situation worsening. Animated discussion over the phone left him wondering what was unfolding.

Ten minutes later, Ganapathy emerged with a grim expression etched on his face.

'The situation is spiraling out of control. South Indians are under attack in Delhi. R.K. Puram is ablaze, and over 60 people have lost their lives. The police remain passive, and many families are fleeing the city,' he conveyed.

Rama Krishna Puram, also known as R.K. Puram, was a residential colony for Central Government employees in South West Delhi. It comprised double-story housing blocks, and numerous South Indian government officers resided there. Construction was still underway in some sectors.

'Are Damodaran anna and his family safe? They live in R.K. Puram,' Vijaylaxmi inquired, trailing behind Ganapathy.

'Yes, he's unharmed. Sector 2 wasn't attacked. However, Sector 5 has witnessed most of the casualties. Damodaran is even contemplating moving to Madras for a few days,' Ganapathy replied.

'Why are they targeting South Indians?'

'It appears to be retaliation. A couple of days ago, North Indian houses and shops were attacked in Sowcarpet. Anna intervened, but evidently, news reached Delhi.'

'Have they also attacked South Indian shops?'

'Delhi has very few South Indian shops. Most South Indians there are government officers. Damodaran mentioned that Congress party mobs wielded iron rods, knives, clubs, and even kerosene. They indiscriminately targeted South Indian men and women, ransacking and burning their homes.'

'But how can they distinguish South Indians? To me, everyone looks the same.'

'They're making people speak in Hindi before attacking. A pronounced South Indian accent is enough to incite the mob.'

'It's horrifying,' Vijaylaxmi murmured, her hand covering her mouth.

'I fear it may escalate to a level akin to Partition. This time, the government seems directly involved. Radio stations aren't reporting it, and foreign reporters are under house arrest. Even BBC News won't be of much help.'

'Do you think word will spread here, leading to attacks on North Indians?'

'I hope not, but with an angry mob, reason and logic hold no sway.'

'With the hostel closed, where are the North Indian students from the university?'

'They all left for their hometowns on the first day, including my roommate Vinay,' Moon replied.

'I've asked Damodaran to call me every two hours to ensure his family's safety. He'll keep me updated. Meanwhile, I hope our people won't retaliate against North Indians here.'

'Sir, I have a confession: Professor Subbaiah isn't in Hyderabad.'

'What do you mean? He called me from there.'

'He suspected you were spying on him for the government.'

'Is that what he told you? I'm his best friend; I'd never do that.'

'Considering your close relationship with the police inspector, he might have been cautious. The inspector has been coming home every night and leaving in the morning.'

'Then I must meet him. He'll have more information about the situation. We need a plan to organize other Brahmin friends.'

'Very well, sir. I'll inform you when he returns tonight. As for me, I'll head home and continue my book.'

'Actually, I have a better idea. When he arrives, bring him here for dinner. He must miss home-cooked meals, especially since Malathi is away. We can also call Damodaran for the latest updates.'

•••

Moon spent the afternoon on the verandah, gazing at cloud formations and occasionally attempting to read Discovery of India. His futile efforts to stay awake persisted.

BBC News provided little new information, and there was no mention of the horrific attacks in R.K. Puram. All India Radio portrayed the government as firmly in control. However, there were reports of attacks on North Indians in Madras, Coimbatore, Hyderabad, and Bangalore—nothing about the revenge attacks in Delhi.

After a lunch of *upama*, Moon felt a little full. Four hours had passed since he left Ganapathy's house, so he decided to take a walk on the campus grounds. Exercise would help him digest his meal and strengthen his limbs. His goal was to leave the country as soon as possible.

The staff quarters were surrounded by a brick wall with only two entrances—one in the front and the other in the back. Both were closed, and the

police kept watch. Although a few North Indian families still lived on campus, the agitators didn't bother them, nor did the army.

How does Professor Subbaiah manage to sneak in every night?

As Moon approached the common playground, he observed children playing, blissfully unaware of the turmoil outside. Their school had closed indefinitely, and they reveled in shouting and chasing each other with imaginary swords.

Youngsters played hockey on a small grassy patch, while three girls chatted under a tree, clutching cheap plastic dolls.

Moon sat on a wooden bench in the shade, watching the spirited hockey match. Most kids were barefoot, some wielding proper hockey clubs, while others used stubs of palm leaves. Their enthusiasm remained undiminished.

Children are so innocent, Moon mused. They don't burden their minds with trivial matters like caste, religion, or language. It's only as they grow up that they start differentiating their friends.

He suddenly missed his childhood in Masan, playing *jegichagi* with friends. The day his parents died during the demonstration against President Rhee, he had been busy playing with friends on the school grounds. Like these kids, he hadn't concerned himself with the agitation or ensuing violence.

His mind wandered to his childhood days and his sudden relocation to Seoul at the tender age of fifteen. His mother's brother had been kind enough to provide him shelter, but was too poor to pay for his education. Moon had to do odd jobs and saved enough money to complete his education. Luckily, he got a scholarship to study at Seoul National University, which finally brought him for a year to Madras.

Now with the agitation getting stronger, he was afraid he would have to return back to Seoul midway. There were only two things that worried him now: getting back to Seoul at the earliest, and transferring to another foreign university for his exchange program. He was slowly recovering from the injuries suffered during the stampede, but his cast could only be taken off after he returns home.

This time I will try to go to a university closer to home, maybe China or Japan. At least our culture, food, and climate are the same. My mistake—I should have made friends with the Chinese and Japanese here; they seemed cordial and would

have guided me. It is always a mistake to carry over the historical legacy of mistrust when dealing with people.

Lost in thought, he was interrupted by a child's voice.

'Uncle, are you from China?'

A small girl with ponytails stared at him. He smiled and, without realizing why, lied, 'No, I am from Nagaland.'

'Is it close to Japan?' she asked.

'No, it is in India. I am also Indian like you.'

'You cannot be. You look so different from us. My mother said that if you lie, you go to *narak*.'

'Where are you from?' he asked, realizing that she had fair skin.

'I am from Punjab; my papa is a professor here.'

'You look different from Tamilians, but you are also Indian,' he said.

'That is true,' she said and ran away.

It is not just kids; even older people don't consider people from Nagaland as Indians because of their Mongolian features. I wonder how many years it will take for Indians to recognize them as their own countrymen, he thought, remembering the stories of discrimination that his friend Andy had narrated.

He got up from the bench and decided to walk for a while before going back home. His body needed more exercise, and the faster he recovered, the greater his chances of returning to Corea.

A brisk thirty-minute walk later, he was back on the patio, drying his sweat. Seeing him, Ganapathy came out of his house.

'So you decided to get some fresh air?' he shouted out.

'Yes, I wanted some exercise so my body can recover. I hope to return to Corea as soon as possible.'

'Worried, eh? You should be. I just got a call from Damodaran. The situation is getting worse. More South Indian colonies have been attacked. He estimates that around 200 people have been killed, but there is no curfew; mobs are free to roam around with swords and knives. A few South Indian temples have also been destroyed.' Ganapathy paced himself towards Moon.

'How can the government allow it?'

'That is their way of controlling the agitation here. They do not realize that it could boomerang once the information becomes public. It is bound to slip out; many people have telephones here.'

'What about the situation in Madras? We have no information, although we are in the center of the city.'

'A few friends called me and said that the violence is continuing. Many government buildings have been burnt, and buses are off the roads, but luckily the train service is still running. Fourteen people have immolated themselves in front of Fort St. George.'

'Sir, I can never understand this concept of self-immolation as a form of protest.'

'I've always believed self-immolation to be a common practice in East Asia, where Buddhist monks have been known to set themselves on fire for centuries. It's a form of protest that gained global attention when Thich Quang Duc did so in Vietnam in 1963.'

'In Corea, self-immolation isn't a common practice. Even during the April Revolution, no such incidents occurred.'

'I assumed Buddhism's prominence in Corea would mean familiarity with such practices. Perhaps it's more associated with certain sects of Mahayana Buddhism and Hinduism, not the Theravada tradition.'

'Actually, Mahayana Buddhism is practiced in Corea, which makes the absence of self-immolation as a protest form quite surprising.'

'It might be related to the degree of political oppression in a country, prompting individuals to resort to such extreme forms of protest. It's a complex issue, not easily understood,' Ganapathy mused. 'By the way, don't forget to invite Subbaiah over for dinner tonight.'

'I'll make sure to, sir, but I can't predict when he'll arrive. He sometimes brings guests along.'

'No worries, we'll proceed with dinner as planned. Vijaylaxmi can reheat the food for Subbaiah, and we'll prepare extra in case his guests join us.'

•••

Subbaiah slipped in alone through the backdoor, unnoticed, around nine o'clock. The moon's natural light was obscured by clouds, aiding his stealthy entrance.

Moon remained in the living room, having closed all the windows and the front door to keep mosquitoes out. A previous oversight had allowed the insects to infiltrate, and he'd suffered their relentless bites. Now, with the radio off, he attempted to read by the dim glow of an incandescent light bulb.

From the dark kitchen, Subbaiah peeked at Moon. Realizing the coast was clear, he whistled softly. Moon responded by shutting off the lights and lighting a candle.

'How was your day? Any more policemen snooping around for me?' Subbaiah asked.

'No, sir. But I have new information. Professor Ganapathy isn't a government spy; he actually wants to join your movement,' Moon replied, providing a vivid account of the day's developments, including details of the revenge killings in Delhi.

'We must be cautious. It could be a ruse to lure me to his place. Did you notice anyone visiting his house this evening?'

'No, sir. I came inside at six-thirty due to the mosquitoes. I didn't hear any vehicles.'

'They might have parked outside and walked here. Ganapathy is a good friend, but when caste matters come into play, one never knows what he might be forced to do. Community ties often outweigh friendships in this region.'

'Do you think he'd deceive you and get you arrested? That seems unlikely; he appeared genuinely concerned.'

'You may be right, but I won't take chances. Go ahead and check if anyone's in his house. If you notice anything suspicious, make an excuse and return here. I'll give you ten minutes, then follow.'

'What should I tell them?'

'Say I'm taking a bath and sent you ahead to get the food heated—I'm feeling very hungry.'

Moon closed the front door behind him as Subbaiah slipped into the bathroom. Approaching Ganapathy's house, he strained his ears for any new voices. Subbaiah's caution seemed unfounded; there was no one there except the couple. After delivering his excuse for coming alone, Vijaylaxmi retreated to the kitchen, while Ganapathy motioned for Moon to take a seat.

'Sir, did you receive any more calls from your brother-in-law?'

'No, he was supposed to call an hour ago. We're getting worried. In our last conversation, he mentioned that many neighbors had left for their hometowns.'

'Professor Subbaiah might have more information on the situation here. He seemed more relaxed than yesterday.'

'Then I guess Anna has garnered support from other sections of society. I hope he consolidates his position before more innocent lives are lost.'

The news Subbaiah shared over dinner was positive for the movement. An outpouring of anger swept through all four southern states, with people taking to the streets. Backed by local police and some army units, the rank and file of the Madras Regiment had deserted with their arms and ammunition. Anna had convinced a few South Indian officers to break away and lead the deserters—an amateur local army in the making. Now, the South Indians in the Air Force and Navy needed similar persuasion.

Frequent clashes were erupting between anti-Hindi and pro-Hindi supporters, with the former outnumbering the latter. However, this balance would likely shift once the remaining army units arrived in the south.

Many Congress politicians from the southern states had secretly pledged their support, aiming to safeguard their assets. Those who hadn't fled to Delhi. Surprisingly, none of the other non-Hindi-speaking states had shown interest in joining the agitation; their sense of patriotism remained intact. The next few days were critical for the movement.

Moreover, the international community was becoming involved. The United States, United Kingdom, and France had called for restraint. However, there were no official statements yet from the Soviet Union and China. A few Pakistani intelligence agents had informally contacted Anna's core group, offering arms and ammunition. Anna declined, despite opposition from some party members who didn't care about Kashmir.

'Do you think international pressure will work?' Moon asked.

'Not unless the Soviet Union and China exert pressure on Indira,' Subbaiah replied.

'Ganapathy, I appreciate your offer to rally the Tamil Brahmins behind our movement. If your community openly supports Anna, it will boost our confidence.'

'Open support may be difficult right now,' Ganapathy responded. 'Moon may have told you about today's visitors from the temple.'

'Yes, he did. I hope your friends can find a solution. Moon also shared information from Damodaran—that many South Indians in Delhi are being targeted. The North Indian attackers don't differentiate between Brahmins and non-Brahmins. Your community is also a victim, and joining us is the way out.'

'I'll speak to Inspector Bala, who's helping me in this mission. By the way, I spoke to him on the phone after lunch. You can stay here; no one will come to arrest you.'

'That's a relief, but I may need to sneak out occasionally to my party headquarters.'

'I insist you and Moon come here for meals every day. It's the least I can do to help during this difficult time,' Vijaylaxmi said. 'I've been thinking, and being excommunicated by the priests isn't a big deal. After this is over, they'll welcome us back.'

'That's a load off my shoulders,' Ganapathy said, relieved. The phone rang. 'Ah, that must be Damodaran.'

He hurried to answer. After a brief exchange, he hung up, looking thoughtful.

'What did Damodaran say? Anything new?' Subbaiah asked.

'The situation is dire. More South Indians have been killed. Curfew has been declared due to international attention. It'll be lifted tomorrow morning. Damodaran will take an Indian Airlines flight to Chennai; all trains are full.'

'He's a high-ranking government official. Why should he leave? The government should ensure his safety.'

'He hoped for that, but he's worried about his family. All South Indians have been abandoned. The mobs are frenzied—not just North Indian Hindus, even Sikhs have joined. Indira is blaming a foreign hand, alleging an attempt to break up the country. She's using nationalism to quell the agitation in South India.'

'It's the first time an Indian Prime Minister has directly accused the CIA of intervention. If it works, she'll continue using it to crush dissent,' Subbaiah remarked.

'Subbaiah, can I broach a sensitive topic?'

'Of course, feel free to ask, and I'll provide the best answers I can.'

'Are you certain that neither the CIA nor the ISI have approached Anna or any other leaders, offering assistance?'

'I can't speak for the CIA, but yes, a few ISI agents did attempt to make contact with Anna. He promptly turned them away.'

'Do you reckon he'd accept help from the CIA if it were offered?'

'What sort of assistance could they provide? Our political front boasts a robust grassroots network, and we're prepared to stand on our own. That's why we've garnered support from a faction of the military and police. While the local media is behind us, they've been coerced into silence.'

'The Madras regiment is just a small unit within the Indian army; I doubt they could withstand the full force of the military. If you truly aim to challenge the government and draw international attention, you may need to seek aid from America. What's unfolding in Delhi and Bombay borders on genocide. If left unchecked, it could spread like wildfire to other northern cities.'

'Bombay? The attacks have reached Bombay as well?'

'That's what Damodaran informed me. He's privy to sensitive government intel that most outsiders lack.'

'Our intelligence network in Delhi is lacking, and Damodaran's connections could prove invaluable. Since he's arriving tomorrow, perhaps he can assist us in gathering accurate information and reaching out to various embassies.'

◆◆◆

Damodaran's pivotal role in the movement became evident mere days after his arrival. Through a flurry of phone calls to foreign embassies, he shifted the tide in their favor. Meanwhile, the exodus of South Indians from the north persisted, fueled by escalating attacks that spawned chilling tales of horror.

The exodus of South Indians from the northern part of the country was still continuing at a brisk pace, as the attacks on them intensified. They brought back horror stories that had the ability to churn the stomachs of even the most ferocious lions.

North Indians in the southern States were relatively unharmed, as Anna had issued strict warnings to his cadre that it was necessary to gain sympathy from the West. Despite this, many North Indians preferred to be safe and started returning back to their hometowns.

Just as the northern regiments of the Indian army reached the borders of Mysore, and the Indian Air Force was on standby to launch ariel attacks on the southern states, United States announced the withdrawal of troops from South Vietnam.

Getting a toehold on the Indian subcontinent seemed to be a more important agenda, now that its ties were strained with Pakistan, which in turn wanted to avail of this opportunity and liberate Kashmir.

Realizing that the situation could get out of hand soon, Subbaiah purchased a one-way ticket to Pyongyang and put Moon on the first flight out. He could now concentrate on the more important task of liberating South India from Indira's grip.

Although he no longer had a first-hand account of the volatile situation, Moon kept regular tabs from Corea. It would be nearly two months after his departure that South India would finally gain independence. The United Nations could not intervene because of opposition from Soviet Union and China, so the United States decided to go it alone.

The final straw on the back was when Pakistan launched an attack over Kashmir, after a number of infiltrations to precipitate an insurgency in the region.

Facing a war on two fronts, Indira announced a ceasefire with the southern states and concentrated all efforts at pushing back Pakistan. The civil war that divided India was one of the shortest in history, but left a deep mark that would haunt the subcontinent for decades to come.

THE CLOUDS PART

Maya awoke later than usual, the clock's hands pointing accusingly at 10:30 am.

The previous evening had stretched into the night, filled with lingering conversations over dinner with Sunder's father. After returning home, she had retreated to her room while Naga and Sunder indulged in a nightcap, their voices low but animated with the day's political discourse.

The morning light revealed their absence; both had departed for their respective duties. Naga's note on the kitchen table spoke of an early meeting and a promise to return by noon.

Maya, foregoing breakfast, opted for a glass of orange juice and the hum of the coffee maker. The indulgence in sumptuous Dravidian cuisine had left its mark, and she was determined to reclaim her form, especially in Naga's presence.

The living room was a testament to the previous day's neglect, newspapers scattered, The Economist peering out from the chaos. Television offered a brief distraction—a vibrant dance number followed by the familiar comfort of CBS, despite its dated offerings.

A documentary on Corea's irrigation had just concluded, the credits a backdrop to her contemplation.

Maya moaned and stared at the screen. Her mind wandered to Ganapathy and the scheduled meeting today. There was no time to lose, he had been stalling her, and she needed more answers about Naga's father. She was certain that he was hiding something.

Suddenly she remembered the photo that Naga had showed her. There was a third person, whose face was slightly obscured.

Who was the third person? Was it Venkatramaiah?

Maya walked up to the bookshelf and searched for the packet that Naga had shown her. She located it in no time, and walked back to the sofa. Another documentary was playing on the TV, but she hardly looked up at the screen. She was now concentrating on the packet in her hands, which she had unwrapped. The diary and the newspaper clippings were all in different languages,

and she could not make sense of the contents. She looked at the photo keenly. Squinting her eyes, she tried to focus on the face of the third person.

Then it struck her.

It is *abbaji*!

Before her trip to Dravida, her father mentioned about his trip as an exchange student, his stay in the hostel, difficulty adjusting to the food and weather, near-death situation at a public rally and the tough time he had being caught in the midst of the civil war. But he never said anything about his professors, both of whom were clearly close to him, as this photo was taken in one of their houses.

Maybe they were just acquaintances, and he forgot to mention it, or, he did so on purpose. She could find out the truth only after getting back to Corea, as he had a computer phobia and even refused to open an email account.

Ganapathy, now her sole beacon of insight, might illuminate the shadows cast by the photograph. Resolute, Maya prepared to confront the past, photo in hand, as the afternoon awaited.

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As soon as Ganapathy spotted Naga walking alongside Maya, he got up from the bench and raised his arms towards him.

'Your resemblance to Subbaiah is uncanny. How did it escape me before?' he exclaimed, enveloping Naga in a heartfelt hug. Naga, slightly abashed, offered a subdued greeting in return.

Ganapathy gestured towards a more inviting spot. 'Let's sit there; it's cozier,' he suggested, indicating a wooden table flanked by benches.

Taking his place on one side, Ganapathy watched as Naga and Maya settled across from him.

'How's your mother? All well with her?' he inquired.

Naga, seizing the opportunity to steer the conversation, responded with a half-truth. 'She's in Hyderabad, vowing only to return to Madras if *nanagaru* does.'

Ganapathy, uninterested in the diversion, began to reminisce about the savory sambar she used to make.

Naga, opting for a direct approach, confronted him. 'Why did you feign ignorance about my father?'

Ganapathy countered with an analogy. 'Would you disclose details about your closest friend to a complete stranger? Imagine that man there with his dog. If he approached you inquiring about your childhood companion, would you divulge everything readily?'

Maya, sensing the potential for conflict, held back from interjecting, trusting Naga's ability to navigate the conversation.

'No, I'd be wary, but I wouldn't dismiss him outright. I'd try to understand his interest,' Naga replied.

Ganapathy shrugged. 'Perhaps you, as a young man, have the patience for such idle chatter. I do not.'

Naga offered an apology. 'I misunderstood. I should have introduced myself properly as his son.'

Ganapathy imparted some advice. 'Remember, young man, even for a seasoned reporter, basic politeness goes a long way. Don't approach people with accusations if you seek information.'

Naga apologized again, his concern for his father's reputation evident. 'I've been under a lot of stress about *nanagaru's* whereabouts. I can't accept that he defected to Hindustan. You, having worked closely with him, must know the truth.'

Ganapathy's expression softened. 'We were more than colleagues; we were best friends and neighbors for a decade. He was my superior, yet he treated me like family.'

Naga's curiosity piqued. 'Neighbors on the university campus? My mother mentioned we lived there until my father vanished.'

'Yes, and we had plans to remain neighbors post-retirement. We even considered properties in Goa, right by the Hindustan border—a perfect spot for retirement.'

Naga's brow furrowed. 'Goa? But isn't that near the DMZ?'

Maya, puzzled, inquired, 'What's the DMZ?'

Naga explained, 'It's the demilitarized zone, a no-man's land that serves as a buffer between our nation and Hindustan. Stretching 1,500 kilometers and about 5 km wide, it's the world's most fortified border, laden with mines to prevent crossings.'

Maya's concern was evident. 'Isn't that perilous?'

Ganapathy dismissed the concern with a wave of his hand. 'People still reside there. The houses we found were atop a hill, overlooking the Arabian Sea, with stunning beaches. Their proximity to the DMZ made them affordable.'

Naga, taken aback, admitted, 'My mother never mentioned owning a house in Goa.'

'That's because you don't,' Ganapathy clarified. 'Our spouses, wary of the DMZ, persuaded us to sell. They preferred settling in Chennai.'

'So, the houses were sold?'

'Indeed, we recouped our investments,' Ganapathy confirmed.

Maya sensed the opportune moment to unveil the old photograph. After a brief discussion with Naga, they had concurred that it might coax Ganapathy into opening up.

'Sir, was this captured at your residence?' she inquired, presenting him with the photo.

Ganapathy's face lit up with a reminiscent smile. 'No, this was at Subbaiah's abode. My home never housed such distasteful art.'

Naga, quick to defend his father's taste, interjected, 'It's a Hussain piece, still in my possession, and its value has soared.'

Ganapathy scoffed. 'Art's become a mere commodity. I wouldn't spend a dime on it. It's the artist's name that sells, not the art itself. Hussain, now a refugee, was even exiled from his homeland.'

Naga, steering away from the art debate, pressed on. 'And the third individual in this photo?'

'That's Moon, your father,' Ganapathy responded, turning to Maya. 'A dinner party just before the unrest began. We were oblivious to the impending chaos...'

'Did you know my father intimately?' Maya probed further.

'Indeed, as I've mentioned, he was a cherished friend. He took refuge in Subbaiah's home when the university shut down amidst the escalating violence.'

'He claimed to have returned to Corea due to the strife.'

'Yes, but only after a brief stay with us. He was recuperating from injuries sustained in a Marina Beach stampede when the conflict erupted. Once he recovered, we sent him back.'

'And in Seoul, at SNU, did your paths cross?'

'Absolutely. He was our guardian angel, aiding Subbaiah's acclimatization.'

Naga and Maya exchanged a look of astonishment.

'What do you mean by 'aiding Subbaiah's acclimatization'? My father's settled in Seoul?' Naga's voice betrayed his anxiety.

Ganapathy, realizing his indiscretion, signaled for discretion. 'Keep your voice down; we're not alone.'

'So, he didn't defect to Hindustan? It was all a fabrication?' Naga's voice trembled with a mix of excitement and confusion.

'He did travel to Hindustan, but not as a defector, nor was he abducted.'

Naga's mind whirled with questions. How had Subbaiah journeyed to Hindustan, only to end up in Corea? Why hadn't he returned?

Ganapathy, perceiving Naga's inner turmoil, decided it was time to unveil the entire truth. 'Listen attentively,' he instructed, his gaze fixed on Maya. 'Hold your queries until I've finished recounting the tale.'

With nods of agreement, they braced themselves as Ganapathy delved into his narrative, the past vividly resurfacing in his mind.

Not long ago, I shared our retirement plans—to remain neighbors even after our academic careers concluded. Our wives, however, vehemently opposed this idea, especially after we'd purchased the properties. As fate would have it, we sold those houses on the very day Subbaiah vanished.

The morning of that pivotal day, our property dealer called with exciting news: a buyer was keen on our properties and ready to sign the papers within 24 hours. We were elated; for two months, we'd struggled to find takers willing to live so close to the border.

With university vacation time in our favor, we boarded the nine o'clock train to Mangalore. By midnight, we arrived, and from there, a bus took us to Panjim. The journey continued—a bus, then a private jeep—until we reached the quaint town of Arambol, some 30 kilometers away. In those days, Arambol boasted just one lodge, where we checked in around 5 p.m.

Monsoon rains lashed the region, but we had no choice. If we didn't finalize the deal that day, we'd have to return in a month—the new buy-

er was leaving for England on business. Our rendezvous with the buyer was set near the sweet water lake, adjacent to our properties.

Drenched and chilled, we sought warmth at the local shop, where we purchased a bottle of caju feni—a traditional drink with minimal alcohol content. Neither of us had tasted liquor before, but the cashew fruit flavor intrigued us. Subbaiah decided to buy two more bottles for later, and the shopkeeper kindly shut his shop and drove us to our hilltop property in his battered old car.

The businessman awaited us, checks ready. Formalities were swiftly completed. Just as we were about to leave, Subbaiah proposed staying the night. The houses were no longer in our names, and he wanted to savor the feni, gazing out at the sea. The new owner agreed, with the promise that we'd hike back to our lodge first thing in the morning.

That night, we settled into my old house, its fireplace providing comfort. Our conversation ranged from politics to academic matters, all while enjoying feni on the balcony overlooking the Arabian Sea.

I vividly recall a heated discussion about Dravida's chosen economic path. Subbaiah harbored reservations about the policy directions set by our first Finance Minister, Raja Chellaiah. During the civil war, Raja had been a professor at the University of Rajasthan. He quit his job and returned to Madras as Anna's economic advisor.

When MGR formed the first government after the 1971 elections, Subbaiah and Raja were neck-and-neck for the finance minister position. The party was divided—MGR loyalists versus Karunanidhi supporters. Despite Raja's apolitical stance, the Karunanidhi faction backed him due to Subbaiah's perceived MGR affiliation. To prevent party fragmentation, MGR appointed Raja as finance minister.

This decision shocked Subbaiah. He declined other honorary positions, preferring to continue teaching at Madras University. Simultaneously, he sought to regain support from the Karunanidhi faction, hoping for a

shot at the finance minister role in MGR's second term. Subbaiah critiqued Raja's policies, arguing that we weren't ready for an American-style capitalist society. In turn, Raja's supporters labeled him a Communist.

Let it be clear: Subbaiah opposed Indira's rule and had no sympathy for the communists. His vision was a more humane capitalist system—one that uplifted the poor and marginalized.

The night stretched into early morning, our conversation unwavering. Sleep eluded us, yet we resolved to return to our lodge. The path remained dimly lit, and our deadline loomed: reach Panjim by 10 a.m. to catch the bus to Mangalore.

Despite the rain's cessation, the slushy road from my house proved treacherous. We slipped, knees scraped, as we descended. At the foothills, a nearby stream beckoned—a chance to wash away the grime. We cleaned up, realizing no other water source lay ahead for at least half an hour until our lodge. Morning ablutions completed, we prepared to continue.

Taking opposite directions behind bushes, we attended to our needs. I returned to our designated spot, but Subbaiah lingered. His constipation from the previous night necessitated patience.

Ten minutes passed, the horizon hinting at dawn. I called out his name, but silence greeted me. Three more attempts yielded no response. Worried, I approached his chosen bush. No fresh night soil, but a circular hole in the ground caught my attention. About a meter in diameter, it seemed large enough for a human body to slide in. Subbaiah's footprints led to its entrance.

Memories of the 1973 war with Hindustan resurfaced. Four tunnels discovered along the DMZ—Pernem in Goa, Belgaum in Karnataka, Ruyyadi, and Goppili in Andhra Pradesh. Bored through bedrock, these tunnels facilitated swift troop movement. Equipped with lighting,

narrow-gauge railways, and drainage, they were Hindustan's covert preparations for a surprise attack on Dravida.

This smaller tunnel, though, could allow Hindustanis to infiltrate Dravida. I knelt, shouting Subbaiah's name into the dark passage. No response. He had vanished. Waiting an hour, I reluctantly left to catch my bus.

My instinct urged me to report the tunnel and Subbaiah's disappearance to the police. But doubts crept in. His opponents labeled him a communist, and they'd spin rumors of voluntary defection. Subbaiah carried the check from selling his house—a substantial sum. If the police investigated, they'd connect the dots: he'd bought the house, knew of the tunnel, and escaped after spying for Hindustan.

At Madras Central police station, I filed a report: Subbaiah had been kidnapped. Hindustan confirmed this by claiming he'd defected.

'How did he end up in Corea?' Naga's impatience grew.
'Patience, young man,' Ganapathy chided. 'Let me continue.'

After Subbaiah's disappearance, your mother returned to Hyderabad with you. I continued teaching at the university. Most believed my story, but his opponents persisted with the defection rumors. My wife's brother, MGR's principal secretary, even petitioned the United Nations for investigations. But Soviet Union and China's vetoes stifled progress.

Nine years later, Subbaiah called me late at night. He'd slipped into the tunnel out of curiosity, only to be captured by Hindustani soldiers. Tortured initially, he was recognized by a high-ranking officer who saw propaganda potential in announcing his voluntary defection.

Taken to Delhi, he taught Dravidian languages to potential spies and handled their cultural training. After multiple attempts, he escaped to Nepal, trekking through the Himalayas, interior China, and finally Bangkok. He contacted Moon, who arranged a teaching position for me

at Seoul National University. I secured a fake passport for Subbaiah, keeping the secret even from my wife. Utmost secrecy was paramount.

In Bangkok, I reunited with Subbaiah, and together we journeyed to Seoul. Moon had everything arranged for us. In time, Subbaiah secured a teaching role at the university. I facilitated the creation of new credentials for him; it wasn't deceit—merely a name change, preserving his genuine qualifications.

Maya, bewildered, spoke up. 'My father never confided in me. Surely, he would've shared this before my departure to Madras.'

'He feared the risks,' Ganapathy explained. 'A casual slip of the tongue could endanger Subbaiah.'

Naga, still processing, inquired, 'So, he's the Venkatramaiah you roomed with in Seoul?'

'Indeed, he is now Venkatramaiah. His appearance has altered—hair loss has changed him.'

'Are you in contact with him?'

'Yes, we correspond via email. He's retired and a citizen of Corea now. Moon assisted him in settling in Pyongyang. He's eager to hear about your mother and you, but I've been unable to locate her since your grandmother's passing.'

Naga, moved to tears, said, 'Mother will be overjoyed. I'm taking Maya to Hyderabad tomorrow; we can share the news then.'

'Wait,' Ganapathy cautioned. 'It's perilous to reveal he's alive. Take her to Corea for a surprise reunion instead.'

•••

A week had passed, and the clock struck 11 PM on August 1. Naga found himself at Gate 23A of Annadurai International Airport, each minute stretching endlessly as he awaited the boarding call for Flight CE 609 to Pyongyang.

Maya sat beside him, her presence a comfort to Naga's elderly mother, tending to her with gentle care. Maya had chosen to truncate her visit, prioritizing the impending reunion over her research. The prospect of meeting Naga's father, and the chance to embrace her child once more, outweighed all else.

The ruse to convince Naga's mother to join them was simple yet necessary: a trip to Corea under the guise of meeting Maya's parents to solidify their nuptial plans. This white lie, a seed of future possibility, was the gentle deception they needed. But Naga knew any pretense would dissolve in the joy of his mother's reunion with Subbaiah.

As the boarding announcement finally echoed through the terminal, Naga's heart skipped a beat. He stood still, a mix of anticipation and anxiety coursing through him.

'Whatever happens, happens for the good,' he whispered, a mantra of hope, as they stepped forward into the unknown.

GLOSSARY

Aatmanirbhar- Self-sufficient (Hindi)

Abboji- Father (Korean)

Aigoo- Oops (Korean)

Amma- Mother

Anni- Sister-in-law (Tamil)

Apdi aa- Is that so (Tamil)

Appa- Father

Avakaaya- Mango pickle

Balli- Gecko, house lizard

Balli Dosha Shastram- Astrology that talks about the lizard falling effects

Bosingtang- Korean soup that includes dog meat as its primary ingredient

Bulgogi- Korean dish that usually consists of grilled marinated beef, chicken or pork

Chinkies- Derogatory term used to refer to the mongoloid race

Chosŏn Chŏnjaeng- Korean War

Da / Daai- Hey man (Tamil)

Dal- Lentil soup

Danil minjok- One nation with pure Blood. It is based on the belief that Koreans form a nation, a race, or an ethnic group that shares a unified bloodline and a distinct culture.

Dharna-A fast undertaken as a means of obtaining compliance with a demand for justice

Eonni- Sister-in-law (Korean)

Ganja- Marijuana

Garu- Respectful title (Telugu)

Ghe Shiki- Son of bitch (Korean)

Glasnost- Policy that called for increased openness and transparency in government institutions and activities in the Soviet Union

Gochujang- Savory and pungent fermented Korean condiment made from red chili, glutinous rice, fermented soybeans and salt

Golti- A racist term used for people from Andhra Pradesh, implying that they are extremely stupid in an adorable way.

Guru dakshina- Tradition of repaying one's teacher or guru after a period of study or the completion of formal education

Haejangguk- Thick, spicy, and very hearty soup made from ox (beef) bone broth with soybean paste

Hallyu- The Korean wave, refers to the significant increase in the popularity of South Korean entertainment and culture starting in the 1990s, in Asia, and more recently in other parts of the world

Idli – rice cake

Ilaneer- Tender coconut water

Iljae Sidae- Period of Japanese rule over Korea

Janeu- Holy thread that is worn by the Hindu Brahmins of India

Jegichagi- Korean traditional game It requires the use of people's foot and Jegi, which looks like a badminton shuttlecock, made of paper, or cloth. The player kicks a jegi up in the air and keeps on kicking to prevent from falling to the ground. In a one-to-one game, a player with the greatest number of consecutive kicks wins.

Kaalia- derogatory racist term used to refer to black people

Kapu- Vaishya caste in Andhra

Kamzhatang- Spicy pork bone soup made with pork spine, vegetables, green onion, hot peppers and ground wild sesame seeds

Kimchi- Traditional fermented Korean dish made of vegetables with a variety of seasonings. It is Korea's national dish, and there are hundreds of varieties made with a main vegetable ingredient such as napa cabbage, radish, scallion, or cucumber

Kunjoos- Stingy (Hindi)

Lathi- Means stick and also refers to a martial art based on cane fighting. The word is used in Hindi, Bengali and various other languages.

Lorries- Trucks

Lungi- Traditional garment worn around the waist in Indonesia, Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Burma, Brunei, Malaysia, Singapore, the Horn of Africa and the southern Arabian Peninsula

Machchan- Brother-in-law, also used as a friendly greeting (Tamil)

Mallu- Short for Malayalam speaking people, the language spoken in the southern state of Kerala

Makgeolli- Alcoholic beverage native to Korea, made from a mixture of wheat and rice, which gives it a milky, off-white color, and sweetness

Nanagaru – Respectful word for father (Telugu)

Naan- A leavened, oven-baked flatbread that is typical of and popular in West, Central and South Asia

Nadan curry- Kerala beef curry

Narak- Hell (Hindi)

Pitaji- Father (Hindi)

Rajya Sabha- Upper House of the Indian Parliament

Rakshash- Demon (Hindi)

Rowdies- Gangsters, lumpen

Saala- Brother-in-law (Hindi), also used affectionately for friends

Saar- Sir

Sambar- A vegetable stew or chowder based on a broth made with tamarind and pigeon peas, and is very popular in the cooking of southern regions of India

Samguk Yusa- Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms, is a collection of legends, folktales, and historical accounts relating to the Three Kingdoms of as well as to other periods and states before, during, and after

Satyagraha- Fast

Shikoro- Shut up (Korean)

Shikya- Bastard (Korean)

Soju- A distilled beverage native to Korea, comparable to vodka, though often slightly sweeter

Suprabhatam- Auspicious dawn prayer

Tauba Tauba- God forbid (Hindi)

Thalaivar- Leader (Tamil)

Thammuda- Younger brother (Telugu)

Ttong- Shit (Korean)

Upama- simple rice snack usually served for breakfast

Vatan- Country, motherland (Hindi)

Yaar- Dear Friend (Hindi)

Zamindari- A zamindar was an aristocrat, typically hereditary, who held enormous tracts of land and held control over his peasants, from whom they reserved the right to collect tax. The Mughals introduced the system

Zutho- Fermented drink obtained from rice commonly consumed by all Naga tribes in the rural regions of Nagaland